

Never, Never, Never Quit

*Craig A. Eddy*



Book 3 of  
The Unholy Wars of Home

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by  
Craig A. Eddy

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I have seen the phrase 'Never, Never, Never Quit' attributed to Winston Churchill, but have been unable to find a reference to that direct quote by him. The closest I've found is 'Never give in' October 29, 1941, when he visited Harrow School. In any case, whether or not it's true that he actually said it, it should have been, and I use it in acknowledgment of the achievements he made during the Second World War.



# Chapter 1

## The Answered Question (Saturday morning)

"I hear you had some excitement here, Tuesday."

"Hey, Zeb. How's it going?" Muriel said. "Yea, just a touch. We found out who was trying to destroy the world's economy, and thus civilization as we know it. In the process, we must have upset a few people, so they contacted a country and had them send fighters with missiles against us. Nuclear. Messy. However, we prevailed, as you might say."

"Prevailed, huh? The way I hear it it was less than five minutes from the time you got the alert to the time they were grounded, the pilots stripped and put into custody, and the planes destroyed. Yea, I'd say you prevailed," the Coast Guard Captain said.

"So, how are things with you? Your commander give you any flack over having taken the training?"

"Nope. Happy as a clam. Especially when we showed him the ship, just after going over it with the training. Between smoothing the skin, repainting the whole thing, and adding the shield, we gained five knots on the cruising speed. And about seven on the maximum speed. We didn't bother to tell him that we could either make it fly or just translate it to where it was needed. At least not at first," Zeb said.

"Uh, huh. And now you're going to try to keep me in suspense about the drug runner that you apprehended fifty miles from where you were supposed to be, and where there was no way that you could have reached them from your last known position as logged by the GPS."

"Well, we had a tip, and . . . WAIT a minute! How did you know?"

"Oh, a girl has to have some secrets," Muriel said.

"I told her," Mata said. "A certain Sergeant Carter was keeping an eye on you, and told me about it. Sounds like you had fun."

"Oh, yea. We didn't know that we were translating into a storm. So, here we are, hitting good sized waves and rocking side to side when we put one over the bow and flicked on the siren. They had to have panicked seeing a ship come out of nowhere and firing a shot in front of them. I know I really DID feel like Vanderdecken, then. And half the crew was sick until we could finally stabilize the ship. So, I sent the trained team over, and put the men in custody, then towed the ship in. And that was our week."

"So, we both had a chance to show off. The record of the Battle of Enclave was never

officially released, but I understand that an unauthorized video from it, without sound, was posted on the Internet. It received over a thousand hits in the first day, and by now may be well over a million. I wonder what person whose name starts with 'M' could possibly have done that."

"Not me," said Mata. "I was busy. So that leaves either you or Melanie. Guess." Mata left her desk and came into the casual area and grabbed a cup of coffee. "You DO know that you're corrupting this poor, young, innocent girl, don't you, Muriel?"

"Well, yea. I have been corrupting me a bit."

"Um, you are not the 'poor, young, innocent girl' that I was referring to," Mata said.

"Well, I'm the only one there is, here," Muriel replied. "If you meant you, then you'd have had to leave out 'young', as you definitely and by your own admission aren't. You would also have had to leave out 'innocent' as, even ignoring your advanced age, you've been around both Ted and I too long to be able to hold that status. So, where's that leave you? Poor girl," she said, and snickered. "How's the coffee?"

"Good, as usual," said Mata. "But then, I have refined taste. Unlike some people that add all sorts of things to it."

"If you mean me, well, just consider," Muriel said, "coffee has less caffeine in it than soda. And less sugar, even considering what I add to a cup. Then, when you consider that I add milk to it also, why, you have a complete meal."

Mata just snorted. "I'm glad," she said, "that I went to spill proof cups and glasses. Around you they're necessary." And grinned.

Zeb just waited until the banter ran down, then said, "I don't believe I've had a chance to see that video. You wouldn't happen to have a copy of it would you?"

"As a matter of fact, I do," Muriel said, and brought it up on her screen and showed it to him.

Zeb watched it through to the end, then said, "This isn't the one that's on the Internet. This includes the mental sends you made to your friends."

"You're right. It also has Ted's spliced onto the end, from the point where I went after the pilots commander."

"I caught where you almost over-flew the formation," Zeb said.

"Yep. The kids surprised me. They literally stopped the planes in mid air, then moved them as a solid mass to the wasteland and pancaked them from twenty feet up. With some force behind it to create enough damage that they wouldn't ever fly again. Too much internal damage," Muriel replied.

“Did I see that right? That they were actually over Enclave when you cut the power to them?”

“Yep,” she replied. “They were in the no-fly zone before that, of course. But close enough that they made it to the physical border of Enclave before the kids could kill the engines. And they were headed directly for the Ambassadors offices, which you might not have noticed since they were coming in from behind them.”

“So there was no question as to where they were going. Yea. You did the right thing. And quickly and efficiently. No muss, no bother. Just get in, get the job done, and get out. Well done, all the way around.”

“Tell that to my friends,” Muriel said. “They’re the ones that did it.”

“Yea, and you’re the one that gave the orders, then stood back and let them handle it their way. Basically, all you did was give them the order in which to do the things. Each one of them followed that order, but each did it in their own way. Effective. No micromanagement, no second guessing that could have delayed the operation. No joggled elbows. So, I’ll congratulate you, too, for knowing how to give orders and then leave the troops to do the job.”

“Well . . . thanks.” And Muriel blushed.

“Hardest thing a commander needs to learn, is when NOT to give orders, or when enough is enough,” Zeb said.

“By the way, changing the subject a bit, I found out Sergeant Carter’s first name. And I realize that it might cause confusion to humans. His name is Zebadiah – Zeb for short.”

“Ah. Well, we have human and Envoy named Fred, and the same named Fran. Those with training learn to distinguish by mental signature. But you’re right, it can be confusing to some,” she said.

“He’s a good man,” Zeb said, more to himself than to Muriel. “Probably as close to Envoy as a human can get. That is until Envoys close the gap from the other side. You DO know that he took over from Caleb. He said that as long as he was hanging around to watch his daughter in action, he might as well be doing something productive. That’s not the real reason, though, and he and I both knew it when I talked to him. He’d already started by working with the new arrivals, especially the military ones, long before Caleb decided that enough was enough and he need a break.”

“Yes,” said Muriel. “And he’s put the other military to doing things besides just moping around feeling sorry for themselves. They’re acting as greeters, especially for military where they put on a great show. Raised their balance levels a bunch in the process. I hear that more and more are electing to come back. And that’s good. We need people like that – people that understand that sometimes you have to fight for what you believe in.”

"I've got a question for you, that I'm not sure you would want to answer, even if you happen to know the answer. There's been some discussion in Home about sending humans back in created bodies, like Ted did. How would you feel about that?"

"Depends on the people. People like Ted, or even like Zeb Carter, no problem. They've got their head on straight, and are balanced enough that they have good decision making ability. Without that balance, I wouldn't trust them and wouldn't train them. The only problem I see is the same one that Ted faced. He couldn't come back as himself. Too many people knew he'd been killed. So he came back as a fake Envoy, then eased people into realizing that he was Human Returned." She sat back and thought for a minute. "It is a good question, and I don't really have a good answer. Maybe because I don't see where they'd fit in, here, in what is already an overpopulated world. Have you talked to Ted about it?"

"No. Not yet," said Zeb. "I wanted your opinion, first."

"Why?"

"Because you have a point of view that is dramatically different from his, because of the way you work through questions and problems," said Zeb. "His point of view would be more technical. The mechanics of making a body and ensouling it. The problems of maintaining 'self' in the process. He did the whole things in rage, desperation, and instinct. And, indeed, that's going to be a factor. I wanted the human side from you, first."

"Ah. Well, my opinion is that we should discuss this with him, and maybe some other Envoys before we actually put it out as a possibility," Muriel said. "Bart and Mata, certainly. Maybe Caleb, too. And there's the other side of it to be considered, too. Creating bodies for Envoys to ensoul."

"Yea, and I know that Ted is working toward that. Which is why I wondered about directly ensouling created bodies with human souls as a possible step in between."

"Now, that's a good point. Start with someone that's used to having a body, and see what the problems are there, then move on to Envoys," Muriel said. "There's also the question of whether or not they should come back with the training."

Ted came in and sat down. "I've been following this conversation," he said. "Mata shared it with Bart, and he shared it with me. Zeb, you're asking good questions, and you're both coming up with good questions and answers. But the overall question is how do we fit humans back into the world, particularly when people know that they're dead. The only ones that really knew me are dead. Others knew about me, but nobody made the connection between a name and a person. Partly because I only used my first name. That's how I managed it. That, and I stayed away from places where I might have been known."

"Has anyone that's seen you on TV or something ever contacted you?"

"No. I changed my face enough to throw that off. Plus, it's been some time since I was actually alive, and that's changed me, too. Especially in the past couple of months, for

some reason,” he smiled, looking at Muriel.

“Ahm SURE Ah have NO idear WHAT you're talkin' about,” said Muriel in the worst mixture of Boston and Southern accents she could manage. And they all laughed.

“Let's face it, Muriel. Like all women, you change men. Not always for the better,” Ted said.

“Humph. She even changes Envoys,” Zeb added, grumpily.

“Oh, stop. You make it sound like I'm some sort of monster,” Muriel said. “I don't try to change you. You just have to adapt to having a twelve year old girl ordering you around.” And that set off more laughter.

“Mata,” Ted said, “you've been quiet through this discussion. Do you have any opinions?”

“Well, not really. Oh, Bart's busy, or he'd be over here, too. But he and I are connected, and he's been following all of it, and I think I can give you his opinion. He'd say find someone that's well balanced, can be trained, and try it. We'd have to know what you did, Ted, to create your body.”

“Huh. I just enveloped myself in what I'd felt as a human, then modified from there as needed to strengthen and try to improve it,” Ted said. “Mark tried to deep scan me when we first set up Enclave together. He wasn't successful.”

“Was that because you were still blocking part of yourself off?” asked Mata. And Ted blushed.

“You could be right. Maybe we need him in on this, too,” he said. “He's busy with something, right now, though,” he added, after a pause. “So we'll have to wait until he's done. He said it wouldn't be long.”

“Oh, good,” said Muriel. “Because I don't think we'll get anywhere before we can get his input.”

“Excuse me, I'm looking for the leaders? Ted and Muriel? Would you know where I could find them?” a voice came from the doorway to the office.

“Right here,” Muriel said. “Come on in. Have a seat. What can we do for you. Oh, I'm Muriel.”

“My, you're nothing like I was led to believe. From the way people talked about you, I expected someone eight feet tall and radiating like a light bulb. Oh, my name is Robert Garcia. American mother, Mexican father, if that makes any difference. I was told that I needed to get stripes from you.”



"That can be arranged, Robert, or can I call you Bob? And the eight feet tall and glowing is only for people I don't like. So, who trained you, Bob?" Muriel asked.

"Oh, uh Mark. He said to tell you Doctor Mark, if that makes a difference to you," he said. Ted got a puzzled look on his face.

"And how'd you hook up with him. Usually, the only humans he sees are patients."

"Oh, no nothing like that. I've known Mark for a while. Just never got back here to see him and say hi."

"Uh, huh. Bob, we have a problem. You're telling me the truth, but you're using it to lie to me. There must be a reason. And I'll find out before we go any further. MARK!" she said and sent. "GET IN HERE."

"OK, Muriel," Mark said, as he translated in. "I'll confess. Bob has been dead for about fifty years. Just to be sure, we changed his appearance some. He and I have been working on this ever since Ted showed up and threw out the usurper and ended up leader of Home. Bob had been about ready to come back, anyway, and I talked to him about the possibility of pulling a Ted and creating a body. We've kept him out of the way any time you or Ted were in Home, and worked on correcting problems with his body and strengthening it. I started training him last week, and just finished up, today."

"Uh, huh. Zeb, how much did you know about this? Since you were the one that raised the possibility, I presume you knew something."

"Well, I knew Mark for a long time before I went into the masquerade. So when we came out here, I looked him up. He told me what he was doing, and said that he'd try to time it for when I was here, to feel you and Ted out before he sprung Bob on you," Zeb said.

"OK. Bob, how far did you get with your training. I see you have a shield, and that you create your own clothes. Can you translate? And have you made the trip to and from Home alone?"

"I can translate. It's a little different, here, but Mark showed me what to watch out for, and had me translate around Enclave a bit before I came over. And, of course, I translated from Home. I haven't translated TO home, though. Is it different?" he asked.

"Not really, though I'll check you on it. But for the sake of touching all the bases, we'll make sure you've done it both ways. For being a human that makes the trip Home and back under your own power you get a passport with a certificate in it that says that you're a Citizen of Home. It's more for the sake of the look of the thing. Ask Zeb. We made him do it, too. So, why don't we take care of that detail, and I'll give you your stripes. Then we can sit down and talk about how to work you into earth without blowing your cover and causing hassles with the government. OK?"

"Yes. Sure. OK. WOW! One minute you're ready to throw me out, and the next

you're finding ways to help me. I can see why people think you're eight feet tall and glowing," Bob said.

"She's like that all the time, Bob. Something in her makeup, we think. She analyzes very quickly, can take a cautious stand and switch very quickly with no indication left of what she may have felt with the first judgment. Oh, and she can smell a lie or an attempt to hide the truth a mile away," Ted said. "It's why she's one of the leaders of Home, as well as being a dual Ambassador. You should have seen the grilling she gave Zeb. He thought he could slip one by her, and she knew he was an Envoy in masquerade. About nailed him to the wall. He was smart and told the truth, and she invited all the Envoys in his crew to 'get legal' at the same time."

"So, let's go make you legal and get you your stripes and passport," Muriel said, standing up.

It actually took longer for her to pass the standard information to Bob than to make the trip. They were up and back in less than a minute, leaving a puzzled Sergeant Carter wondering what happened. Mata contacted him and explained, and he sent his congratulations to Bob.

## Chapter 2

### Discoveries

(Saturday morning)

"Alright," Muriel said, as she and Bob got back to her office, "how are we going to do this?"

"Well, Mark said that it would take some doing. By the way, Bob Garcia isn't the name I had when I was alive, before. So there's nothing tying me back to my previous life. But to actually make me a citizen of this country would be hard," Bob said.

"Definitely hard, which is why I didn't try to do it myself," Ted said. "It would mean forging documents and getting them into all sorts of places. Nope. Not going to happen. No, the only way to do this is to bring him in as a Citizen of Home. Not like an Envoy, but like I was. Envoys don't have passports. Technically, they're not supposed to leave Enclave except on Embassy business. On the other hand, people now know that a person with a Home passport is a human. With the exception of me."

"You're human, Ted," Mark said. "Recreated, yes. But still human. You think human, act human, and have a human outlook. You also have an attitude. In a sense, the rage never left you, you just keep it under control. Tight control, I might add. Otherwise, you might have blasted Muriel a half-dozen times before you realized that kidding is her outlet for frustration and easing tensions."

"You may be right," Ted said. "I seem to have been in a simmering rage most of my adult life. And when that twerp tried to hold me up, it all just blew up. Maybe that's why I was able to do the things I did when I got to Home. NOBODY bypasses judgment square and goes straight for the source of the problem, destroys it, the throne, the hill, and salts the earth by thinking rationally."

"Why, Ted," Muriel said. "Are you saying that you're irrational?"

"Yep." Then he snickered. "Must be. I chose a twelve year old girl as my first trainee."

"Ah, but think of where you'd be if you HADN'T chosen me."

"Yea, sane," Ted said.

"I see. And your definition of sane includes trying to beat a twelve year old girl at her own game, huh? I think psychologists would dispute that opinion," Muriel said. "Brute."

By now, everybody in Muriel's casual area was laughing. And even some of the Envoys in the break area were snickering. Except Ted. Ted was frowning.

"You know," he said, "I think I've figured out why no one can beat you at this kind of bantering. You shift gears and change focus so fast that no one can keep up with you."

"Yep," Muriel replied.

"Now, if I could just figure out how to do it, I might stand a chance," Ted responded. "It's definitely a good trick."

"Well, it's a way of thinking. Psychologists used to call it 'free association'. That, coupled with enjoying puns. Between the two of them, I don't even think of what I'm going to think next. It just pours out."

"More like slithers," Ted quipped, and grinned.

"Aw, poor Ted," Muriel said. "Keeps getting bitten by my quips." And the laughter got louder, and Ted was left just shaking his head.

"OK, we can't get Bob established as a citizen of this country. And he's not an Envoy or an Ambassador. What can we do with him?" asked Ted.

"Put him to work, here. There must be something that he can do," said Muriel. "Everybody has some sort of skill. Even if we have to upgrade his education . . . well . . . that's easily done. All we need to know is what he's done before, and what sorts of things he's good at."

"Law enforcement," Bob said. "The town I worked for believed in 'peace keeping' more than 'letter of the law'. Their theory was that if we had to wait until a crime was committed, then we weren't doing our job. So, we'd go into intervention type things. Counseling couples where we could see a pattern of abuse taking place that hadn't reached the point of being criminal. Fighting drug abuse by working with kids, even having them on the force as trainees. Basically, being a friendly presence rather than in intimidating force."

"And what was your position on the force," asked Ted.

"Commissioner," Bob responded. "Prior to that, I'd been in the Marines as law enforcement, then FBI. I got tired of the rat-race, and retired to that small town . . . well, not really that small – we had about 50 people on the force . . . and they found out about my past. They asked me if I'd be interested in doing it from a different side, and how I'd go about setting it up. I think it's every cop's dream to be able to set up a complete force from the ground up, the way he thinks it should be run. I got the chance."

"Wow," Muriel said. "And you did it without any arrests?"

"Oh! No. We had arrests. Lower numbers than cities and towns around us, even considered by percentages. But we had them. Some of them were people just making mistakes. But some of them were also pretty bad. We couldn't be everywhere, and we couldn't pry into people's minds and lives, so things did happen that we weren't expecting."

So, we did have to act as 'real' police, sometimes. Shootings, suspicious fires, fights, drunk driving, robberies – you know, the usual sorts of things.”

“Ted?” Muriel said.

“I'm thinking. Actually, what I'm thinking is that we need Tex in here. I think we've found the answer to a question we didn't even know we had.”

“You actually think, oh great leader?” Tex said, as he translated in.

“Sometimes. You're out of uniform, troop,” Ted replied.

“Oh. Sorry Ted. This better?” and Tex changed to the Enclave version of his uniform.

“Much. Tex, this is Bob Garcia. He used to be a Marine, then FBI, then commissioner of police for a small town. I'm thinking of asking him to take on the job of law enforcement in Enclave. What do you think?”

“I think I'd like to know why you think you need one,” Tex said. “You have very little crime, other than what's attempted to be imposed on you from outside. No offense, but what do you have to police?”

“Bob?”

“I haven't seen much of Enclave, yet. But what I've heard about made me itch. People demanding entrance claiming it's an open area, assassination attempts, scams, even such things as minor insults. Ted, from what I understand, you or Muriel have had to deal with all that. I don't see robberies or suspicious fires or such, here, probably because of the high concentration of Envoys. But I see crimes against civilians – humans, if you prefer. And you've had to deal with that, and sometimes rely on outside law enforcement to take charge of the criminals,” Bob said. “That you've handled it is to your credit. That you've done so, so well, is remarkable, and you're to be complimented. But the holding of prisoners that you've done is slightly sketchy, without some sort of legal structure behind it to back it up.”

“What do you suggest?” Ted asked.

“Well, I know about your treaty, and the catch-all you put in that you could create the laws to suit yourselves. And that's fine. But, if you're going to hold people, even if it's just until outside law enforcement can get here – sorry Tex, I'm not trying to put you or anyone else down – there should be some sort of mechanism in force to cover it. Having Envoys as security is all very well, but there's nothing to show that they're official, if you see what I mean.”

Ted laughed. “Bob, that was spoken like a true job seeker. So, you're saying that we need codified laws?”

“Yes and no,” Bob replied, and Ted and Muriel both groaned. “Simplified laws, not like

what you see outside Enclave where they try to cover every contingency specifically. That's actually a lost cause. Same with the formalization of a police or security force. It really doesn't need to have every piece of toilet paper accounted for. You work loosely, and that's good, believe it or not. You don't need a court system in here. That you're absolute rulers is fine. That makes your decisions final, and I wouldn't buck that for a moment. It works, considering the mix of people that you have, Envoy and human. Nope, I'd see the chief law to be against disturbing the peace, believe it or not. And even that not necessarily enforced, unless it continues past a warning. You just don't have the normal problems that are seen outside the gates."

"But, take for instance, that mess with the preachers who demanded entrance. You had a restraining order against them, plus at least one of them was armed. One man or Envoy on the gate with those security triangles on his shoulders could have arrested them before they even began their tirade," Bob said. "That could have saved you and Muriel the headache of having to go make formal charges against that crew, if nothing else. They still would have been turned over to outside authority and investigated, as I understand Tex and his crew did. But you two would never have been directly involved, and you wouldn't have had to rely on outside laws to do it."

"Interesting point," Ted said. "Tex?"

"He sure does make a purty argument for it, Ted," Tex drawled. "I'd like to know what he thinks he'd need, and how he'd operate when it wasn't something like that."

"Oh. Sorry. Yes, I left that out, and it makes a difference," Bob said. "Well, we wouldn't need cars or even bicycles. What with being able to translate or even fly where-ever we were needed, those would be senseless. Four squads. One active, one 'walking a beat', two down. The one walking the beat would be the next one up for the active desks, and so on, around. All on call for emergencies, of course. Much like Muriel does with her squads. Oh, and the makeup? Envoys, of course. Mata has shown that Envoys can perform very well under the cloak of security."

"Essentially, those walking a beat would just be a presence, rotating so that they relieve the person on the gate frequently. They'd be there to give directions, help find lost kids, things like that. The desk bound ones would catalog their actions for the shift, and answer calls for assistance and assign elements or even squads to take care of it. Also, investigate any questionable situations," Bob concluded. "I know that's kind of loose, but I'm not sure I know how to define it any better."

"You're saying that the ones on the desks would be back-up?" asked Tex.

"No. They'd be the last ones out the door. No, they'd either move beat walkers in or assign one or more people from an off-duty squad," he replied.

"What about uniforms?" Ted asked.

"Same as what Tex is wearing would be fine. We wouldn't need the guns or radio, or



any of the rest on the belt. And Tex, I understand why you have them, and I'm not putting them down. But we don't want to look dangerous. Just BE dangerous, if needed," Bob said, and Tex laughed. "The only difference between the Envoys and I would be that I'd have stripes on my epaulettes. And visitors wouldn't even see that."

"Ted, I like this guy," Tex said. "And I like his attitude to law enforcement, and the fact that he doesn't want a flashy uniform to show off that he's better than anyone else. And I think I know what he means by loose laws, and that sounds good. Just enough to allow him to hold people legally, if he needs to. I'd say set him up with an office and see how it works out. Oh, and introduce him to Melanie, Henry and Adam, too. Sounds like he's read the treaty, and has an idea of how to construct the laws so they don't constrict either you or him, but are effective and a bridge between the two sides of the Enclave gate."

"Well, Mr. Commissioner, it looks like you talked yourself into a job," Ted said. "I'll have Bart get four squads set up for you, and have maintenance set up an office for you. How about on the other side of my office?"

"Where-ever you want," Bob replied, with a grin, then changed into a version of Tex's Enclave uniform, and Ted applied the Envoy logo on the belt buckle. Mata came in and showed him the security triangles she'd come up with for Muriel's trip to the arms manufacturers disastrous demonstration, and Bob grinned. "Pulled that right out of the military, didn't you, Mata?"

"Hey, they've got to be good for something," she replied, and they snickered.

"Well, unless you need me for something else, then, I'll just start wandering around and introducing myself to the various managers you have, and such. Let them know that there's a place they can holler for help if they want it. I doubt that they'll need it, but it's only polite to let them know we're here."

"How about that," Tex said, as Bob left. "A commissioner that believes in walking a beat. My respect for him just went up a bunch. How fast can you get his office going?"

"A couple of hours. The squads are already formed, and two are already cycling around the two major areas, getting familiarized with the layout," Bart said, as he came in. "The other two are helping build a version of Muriel's office, the way it was originally, to hold the squads. And they're all uniformed. He'll probably meet some of them on his tour."

Frederica translated into the area in front of Mata's desk, and Mata went to meet her. They talked for a minute, then Mata went over to Muriel.

::Frederica is here and wants to talk to you, privately,:: Mata sent. ::And I have a confession to make. In all the confusion over the past few weeks, I forgot that you had an appointment to train the lawyers and staff. I think that's what it's about.:: Muriel immediately got up and followed Mata out.

"Frederica," Muriel said, "Let's take this to my apartment." And the two translated up

to her great room. "So, what's up? Mata said you wanted to talk to me privately."

"Um . . . I may have overstepped my bounds. I found out that the lawyers and staff from the law office were waiting for you to train them, and I took my people over and did the job," she said.

"No, you didn't overstep," Muriel said. "Both Mata and I forgot about the appointment. We ended with a personal situation that blew up into a major catastrophe, and then a major action against religions. That's not an excuse, simply what happened. So, I owe you my thanks for stepping in and helping out. How did it go?"

"Oh, no problem. In fact, they were a blast to work with. A couple of hiccups along the way, but nothing more than I'd been led to expect from talking with your security detail. Certainly nothing serious. Just people bungling getting into clothing. Nope, they all went all the way through. We did have to ask Caleb for help with one man that apparently had a tough time with the judgment. But it only took about fifteen minutes for Caleb to work him through the problem. So, they all passed."

"How about the stripes?" Muriel asked.

"Oh, they all elected to have them on sleeves or wrists. Oh, and we taught them how to move them around, if they wanted to, and how they worked. But we couldn't give them the passports, of course," Frederica said.

"No problem. I'll go over and take care of it, and apologize to them. It was my mistake. Things have been rather confusing, lately, and I just forgot that I'd promised them. What else can I do for you?"

"OH! Nothing, really," Frederica said. "Everything is up and running smoothly. We're slowly replacing Envoys with humans in all the companies. It's taking some time, because we're checking everyone pretty closely, after that mess with the software company. But we haven't had any more situations like that. In many cases, we're hiring back the people that originally had the jobs, partly because they know the job and partly because of your position on not letting the little guy get hurt because of something done by management. Some of them have asked about training, and I've left it up to the companies as to whether they do it. It would certainly help if they had it, but we're not pushing either way."

"That's good. Well . . . Frederica, when you said that you'd try to fill in for me, I certainly wasn't expecting that you'd be covering for me. And I'm sorry that I put you in that position, but I really do appreciate the help. And you've reminded me that Ted asked me to try to outline the philosophy the companies should follow, so I need to get to work on that, too. But first, I need to go apologize to the law office for my forgetfulness." She grinned in self-deprecation. "So, I'd better get going."

They translated back down to Mata's desk, and Muriel told Mata where she was going. Mata elected to come with her. She noted that her casual area had cleared out, except for Ted, and she let him know that she was going to the lawyers office.

"I'd like to come with you, if you don't mind," he said.

"I don't mind. My reason is to apologize for missing an appointment," Muriel said.

"And mine," he said, "is to see about making laws that aren't laws, that Bob can work with and we can live with." He smiled. "What was the appointment?"

"I was supposed to train them. Lawyers and staff. And that was the Saturday that the whole thing with Fran blew up. And I totally forgot. Frederica saved my butt, and she and her staff trained them. I need to give them passports," Muriel said.

"Then I definitely want to come with you. That was partly my fault for being busy with that whole mess of trying to find the top of the pyramid, and not helping you out. So, let's go." And the three translated out.

# Chapter 3

## Apologies and Fun (Saturday afternoon)

They translated into the reception area, and Susan immediately jumped up out of her seat. Ted motioned her to sit down, then turned to Muriel.

“Just what have you been teaching these poor people? You've got them jumping up like new recruits when you come in. That's no way to be,” he said, with a grin.

“Don't look at me. I already told her that I didn't expect that type of behavior. And that you didn't deserve it. It must have been Mata's display the last time she was here,” Muriel said, smiling back, then looking at Mata.

“Oh, yea, right. Blame it all on the poor security chief. I see how you are. I may just make that swap with Bart, yet. Let's see how you deal with him,” Mata said in mock anger.

Susan just looked from one to the other, then shook her head. “Why do I get the feeling that I just got invaded by a comedy routine?” she asked.

“Hmm,” Ted said. “Yea, I can see why you'd think that. It lacks something, though. Some slapstick, maybe? Hitting people over the head or poking their eyes out or something. Oh, I know what it is. You two didn't stick your tongues out at each other, this time.” Whereupon both Muriel and Mata stuck their tongues out at him. And Susan started laughing.

“You people are all crazy!” she gasped.

“Yea,” Muriel said, “but keep it to yourself. Nobody else has caught on, yet.” And that just made Susan laugh harder. Muriel, Ted and Mata simply waited, patiently, until she finally calmed down.

“Seriously, Susan,” Muriel said, “I came over to apologize to everyone for missing my appointment to train you all. Mata came to keep me from running away, and Ted came to watch me humiliate myself.” Which started Susan chuckling, again. “Nothing is more important than the training, and I blew it.”

“Oh, I wouldn't say so. We knew that you were involved in something important. Mata told us. So we asked Frederica if she could finish it. She was happy to. She brought the whole office.”

“Really?” asked Muriel. “Well, look, I'd better get inside and apologize to people. Oh, and if you look in your 'no pocket' you'll find a little green booklet that might be of interest to you.” Susan reached, and pulled out her passport. “Congratulations.”

“Oh, wow. This really makes it kinda official, doesn't it. Citizen of Home. Wow.”

They left Susan admiring the passport and went into the office. As soon as they cleared the door, people started standing up. Not jumping up, like Susan did, but more just trying to see who was coming in. And Beth came hurrying forward.

“Easy! I just came to apologize for not making it to that appointment to train you people. My fault. I simply forgot,” Muriel said.

“My fault,” Mata chimed in. “I should have reminded her.”

“My fault,” Ted said. “I had her working on something else that was important.”

“ARRRG! You two don't have to cover my butt!”

“Of course not,” Mata said. “That's what your pants are for.”

“Of course, if you'd prefer to leave it uncovered . . .,” Ted said, and Muriel blushed and hit him. “FINALLY!” he shouted. “After all this time, I finally got her. You know you've won when they resort to physical violence,” he said, laughing. And she hit him again. “You have NO idea how long I've waited for an opportunity like that.” Which started Muriel laughing.

“It's all right,” Beth said, laughing. “Frederica got us all through it.”

“Yes, but she left something important out of it. In your 'no pocket' is a little green booklet.” They all reached, and found their passports. “As passports they're worthless, since there aren't any check points or customs to go through. But as a reminder of what you've done, well, that's up to each of you,” Muriel said. “Congratulations to you all.”

“Now,” said Ted, “is there a lawyer in here that's conversant with how laws are created? And no, I don't mean a politician.”

“Yes,” one of them said. “You're talking about the basic laws, and the reasons they were created. Not all the branch-off laws that get into specific situations and keep politicians in business.”

“Exactly. Is there some time when we could sit down together and talk about it? We've got a brand new, squeaky clean police commissioner for Enclave, and he'd like something basic that would act as the framework for his acting without hamstringing the ability of the leaders of Home or the Ambassadors from making changes to specific situations,” Ted said.

“Easily. If you'll give me about an hour to finish something up while I'm still fresh with it, I'll meet you in your office and we'll discuss it. What you want are laws that aren't laws but rather guidelines for action. And you want as few as possible. I think we can do that,” the woman said. “It's more philosophy than law, but can be worded in such a way that it would hold up even in the outside world. Just let me finish this, please.”

"Take all the time you need," said Ted. "Send ahead, and I'll let you know where I am." And smiled at the woman.

"Well," said Muriel as they turned and translated out to her office, "at least you don't just give me the hard ones. And if she says it's possible, then the same should be true of the request you made of me."

"Oh, it's possible. Philosophers have tried to tackle basic law time and again, without success, but I think that's because they were trying to either build on existing philosophy or dispute it. Trouble is, I think they were wrong in their basic assumptions. But I can't prove it, as I never took philosophy," Ted replied. "In fact, you might enjoy the discussion, yourself. Your definition of how you come up with your zingers so easily might be the key. Or actually, it's the reverse of what we're looking for. You use free association and puns. That makes use of the looseness of words – of language. Maybe what we need is something that avoids that looseness."

"Hmm. I don't think so," Muriel replied. "Simply because I think I see where philosophies and religions are both wrong in their assumptions. But I'll save that for later. In any case, I think what you're looking for is a definition of ethical behavior, not philosophy."

"And you're going to table the discussion until you've had a chance to at least have a sandwich and glass of milk, young lady," Mata said. "It can wait at least that long. Besides, I have some stuff to clear up, too, and I'd like to be in on the discussion. If for no other reason than to see how your mind veers."

"Well, actually, it doesn't veer. It goes in straight lines until it hits something, then bounces off that into another direction," Muriel said.

Ted just stared at her, his mouth dropped open. Her quip went a long way toward explaining why she behaved the way she did. It also fit in with the way young people tended to act. It even explained her ability with zingers. Her mind, in a sense – and by extension that of a lot of people her age – acted more like one element in a nuclear chain reaction than like linear thinking. Why didn't it continue as people got older? Was it something that they inherently lost with age? Or was it something trained out of them? And was that the real difference between Envoys and humans – that Envoys didn't have that nuclear ability at all? An image of a room full of ping-pong balls set on mouse traps came to mind. Toss in one ball, and shortly you have an explosion of balls going in all directions, randomly.

At that point, Bart sat down beside him and put a plate with a sandwich and potato chips in his hands. "Even when she doesn't do anything, she does something, Ted," he said. "Your analogy is crude, but fairly accurate. It's also why she missed that appointment with the lawyers. She'd bounced off in a different direction. The young are noted for that. Of a lot of species, not just human. Think of kittens. Or babies. Drink your milk. You'll feel better."

Ted carefully put the glass down on the coffee table. Carefully because he found that his hands were shaking. "Can this be learned? Can it even be taught?"



"I'm not sure. And I'm not sure how far it should go. Does it need to be tempered so that the reaction is restricted?" Bart asked. "I notice that you've never restricted it in her. And I think that's good, at least in this situation. But will it naturally temper down with age? I couldn't say."

"Worse," said Mata, "can it be tempered only a little without it ending up tempering it out of her."

"Well, right off hand, I'd say the only way to temper it would be to apply a value structure to the obstacles. Is this something I can bounce off of, or is it something that needs to bounce off me," Muriel said, quietly. "And do I choose the direction, or do circumstances. And can I go back and have a 'do over'."

"Oh, GAD, Muriel. I'm sorry," Ted said.

"I'm not," Muriel said. "However, you were radiating, and I couldn't help picking it up. I think you'll find that my thinking is more like a pinball machine than that mass of ping-pong balls. And yes, I remember that from a movie in school that showed nuclear reactions. But with me, the objects don't move. I do. And sometimes something flips me back up to the top of the board to run the cycle again. Only it's never the same. Minor differences in the way I bounce, variations in the board, itself, whether or not I'm joggled. All sorts of factors make changes in what direction I go."

"Oops. Muriel, I'm sorry," Ted said.

"I'm not. I never really looked at it before," she said, reflectively. "And I think I have an answer for you. The tempering can be learned, but can't really be taught. And that's because each individual IS individual. Their own set of experiences, therefore their own value set of what's important and what can be bounced off of. So, it's learned behavior, in the sense of learning from experience what's important to the individual."

"If that's the case, then I can see why you say that both religions and philosophies are wrong. They're both trying to start from something that's outside them as the true path," Bart said. "You're saying that truth is relative."

"No . . . well . . . relatively relative, maybe. There is a criteria for truth, or at least for determining if something is true. But there's no Truth with a capital 'T'. Too many factors involved for there to be only one truth. What was it that my lawyer said the other day? Something about 'I believe something, that something happens to be a fact, and I have evidence to show that the fact exists.' Something like that, anyway," Muriel said.

"But, if something exists and you have evidence that it exists, then belief is no longer a factor. You don't believe something if it actually exists. You simply know," said Ted.

"Yes! And that's the reason that I took that group of religiosities to judgment square and showed them. Because I knew, and they only believed," Muriel said. "With me, it wasn't

a belief. So, for that one thing I had A truth. But even that wasn't THE truth, because it affected each individual differently."

"OK, so what's ethics?" asked Ted.

"Ethics is the structure for moral behavior," Muriel said, seemingly from somewhere inside of herself. "So, when you talk about one, you talk about the other. One is the rules and the other is the actions, I guess you'd say. And I'd have to say that for humans the basis is survival. Defense is ethical because it fosters the survival of the individual, group, tribe, or nation. But aggression is unethical because it limits or reduces the survival of the individual, group, tribe or nation from a global standpoint. And especially from the standpoint of the one doing the defense or being aggressed against."

"Are laws ethical?" asked Bart.

"They can be. They can also be unethical. It depends on the law. Murder and suicide are both considered against the law because they both reduce the survival of the individual and potentially the survival of the group, tribe or nation. But execution is ethical because it reduces the aggression against the group, tribe or nation. Oh, and aggression doesn't mean just physical aggression. Look at bullies. The purpose of their aggression is to promote themselves at the expense of others, reducing the survivability of those others. And that carries over into business practices," Muriel went on. "Look at the laws that only promote one section of society at the expense of other sections. Sometimes even reducing the survivability of the very sections of society that they depend on to keep them running. Drug manufacturers that charge so much for a particular life-saving drug because of their greed and the realization that some people will have the ability to pay such prices just to survive. And it's allowed by law. That would be an unethical use of law."

"Ouch! And I can see other examples," Ted said. "Even just in that small range of pharmaceuticals. The lack of progress in defeating a particular disease, simply because the money they make from the current drugs that do NOT defeat that disease is so attractive."

Fred slowly made his way to Muriel's casual area with a shocked expression on his face. "You do it, too. But on a much deeper level than I do. How?" he asked.

"I honestly don't know," Muriel said. "I just do it. It's just following a thought to its logical or illogical conclusion. Then discarding the illogical ones. I think some of it is actually instinctive, rather than thought out. I don't even know the reason I make the selections I do."

"Can you rank survival? I mean, is one level of survival more important than another?" he asked.

"I think so. In order of learning, survival of the individual is the first. But in order of importance, survival of the nation, or even the world, is the most important. Everything else is below it, in the reverse order of that by which they're learned. Does that make sense?" Muriel asked.

“Yes. Yes it does.” And Fred wandered back out to his desk.

“Well,” said Mata, “I think I need to make a CD of this and get it off to the President. I think this has the ammunition he needs in dealing with Congress and the mess that the lobbyist have created.” And she went to her desk. “Just don’t come up with anything else until I get back,” she shot back over her shoulder.

Ted looked down at his plate, now empty. “I know that I ate,” he said, “but I have no idea what it was.”

“Don’t feel bad,” Bart said. “I think this discussion hit us all that way. I think I need some of the grape and berry mixture. I’m growing a headache. And I don’t even really have a head.”

“Bart,” Muriel said, “I want you to realize that you are sitting across from me. And that I am not a computer monitor.” The sputter from Mata’s desk showed that Mata was still listening.

“It’s all that thinking, Bart,” said Ted. “You’re not used to it.” Bart just glared at him, then turned to Mata – that was just coming back in the area – and said, “Remind me to get a better, deeper dump of how Muriel thinks. I’ve GOT to best him sometime.”

“OK,” Mata said. “Bart, remember to get a better, deeper dump of how Muriel thinks, so that you can best Ted, sometime.” Bart now had a new target to glare at.

# Chapter 4

## Enclave Becomes Legal (Saturday afternoon)

::Ted, are you available now? I just finished the job I was on,:: the lawyer that Ted had talked to sent.

::I'm in Muriel's office,:: he said, and sent the visual of the front door from the street. Moments later she appeared in the street and headed for the door. And the whoosh doors claimed another victim.

"Whoa. Those doors are a trip and a half," she said. "Oh, by the way, I'm Alice Wilson. I should have told you before. Muriel, I apologize for not telling you when we met. I was a bit shook up by being assigned to an Ambassador."

"No problem, Alice. We were in here plowing through philosophy and ethics, and Ted felt that what you and he are trying to come up with might help me in determining the direction that the companies we took over should go in," Muriel said. "Have you had lunch? And what would you like to drink?"

"I ate at my desk. And a cup of coffee wouldn't be out of place, right now," Alice said.

"Before we begin, I think you should see a record of what we were discussing," Ted said, and got a disk from Mata. Muriel dutifully took it and put it in her computer, turning the screen to Alice so she could see as well as hear.

Alice nursed the cup of coffee while she took in the discussion. She took notes on a tablet on one knee, jotting points of interest and questions she might have. When it came to an end she looked over her notes.

"Let me get this straight. You put the survival of the world as the paramount ethic, with the others ranged below it. What level would you say you're talking about for laws, here? Group?" she asked.

"I think Nation would be the closest," Ted said. "This is actually a subset of Home, according to the treaty. And Home would be considered a nation under American law."

"Ah. OK, that works. Because my next question would have been at what level is execution ethical."

"National level. Anything lower doesn't take into account the needs of the nation or the world," Muriel said. "World, in this case, includes earth AND Home. That's because of the interaction between them."

"So, laws have to be able to work within the whole structure?" asked Alice.

"Yes, insofar as they touch on elements of the other portions of the structure," Muriel said.

"Can you define aggression and defense?"

"Easily," said Muriel. "Aggression is violence, physical, mental or spiritual. Defense is the blocking of aggression in any of those three areas."

"Simplistic," Alice said. "But it works. So, if a company tries to take over another, it's violence. But if the other uses similar tactics to block the takeover, then it's defense."

"Now you're being simplistic, Alice," said Ted. "But, like you said, I think it works. What I'm most concerned with is a law or short set of laws that would allow the new police force to operate to contain unwanted behavior inside Enclave, and interface with outside law enforcement."

"Yep. But keep it within the structure you've set up, and at the same time I'm trying to find an answer to Muriel's problem. And I think they're linked," she said.

"She's quick," Bart said. "Good choice for trying to keep up with Muriel." Muriel just stuck her tongue out at him, and he snickered.

"If it helps," Muriel said, "I've used absolute defense twice in an aggressive manner to contain and control aggression from others. One was at school, when I bottled up the bullies until they could be arrested by the police. The second was when the kids and I captured the planes and pilots, here, inside the 'no fly' zone."

"Can you give an example of using aggression as a defense?"

"Yes," Muriel said. "The rescue of the Embassy workers. I used defensive techniques to bottle up the soldiers and hangers-on, then, when I was shot at, removed their ability to reproduce, and their hands, and left them to the mercy of their own people. I met their aggression with aggression of my own in order to defend myself and, by extension, Enclave and Home. As a byproduct, it also served to defend America by making me the target."

"Ouch. OK, and still reasonable," she said. "Ted, for your police commissioner, this is simplistic but should work within the framework of ethics you've proposed as well as within national and international law and your treaty. 'The police force of Enclave is authorized to use sufficient force to keep the peace, and to detain those that would break the peace.' How does that sound?"

"I think it's workable," said Ted.

"By the way, I met your new commissioner on my way into work. Nice guy. And I don't think he'd abuse that loose law. I know his people wouldn't, being all Envoys," Alice said.

"Now, Muriel, as to your problem. Hmm. I think that laws as such would be out of line. The companies are operating in the United States, under US law, but are owned by Home and administered from Enclave. Plus, the companies are rather diverse, so that makes it harder to come up with one set of laws that would work for all of them."

"I know. It was the stumbling block I came up against. Which is why I started to think about ethical behavior," Muriel said. "I was thinking more of guidelines, generic ones, that all the companies could share."

"Hmm. Yes. Could I get another cup of coffee? This stuff is addictive. Where's it made?"

"Home," said Ted. "We import it for our use, here in Enclave, so that's absolutely legal. We had to modify the treaty some to allow it outside of Enclave when the FBI and President requested some." This brought a laugh from Alice.

"OK, what would you say are the critical things that a company should adhere to?" she asked.

"Quality," said Muriel, "non-aggression toward competitors, reasonable profit – this four hundred percent thing is bogus, cooperation with others – such as creating a plug-in for a file format for an office suite that actually works, then passing it back up to the people that make the competing office suite using that different format. I'm sure there are other companies that we could be friendly competitors with, rather than trying to become a monopoly. I'm still trying to think if there's anything more."

"Those are good. Especially that thing about cooperating with a competitor. May I ask which competitor?"

"The one that makes that open source office suite that uses the ISO standard. Ours made such a hash of the standard that it was effectively useless. So the programmers re-wrote it as a GPL plugin to ours, and passed the plugin back up to the non-profit organization. Later, I went to the non-profit organization and gave them disks for their programmers, to be sure we got it right, and that it would work both ways, effectively," Muriel said.

"Oh, wow. I see where you're going. A lot of businesses are locked into using your program, because of past behavior. So they have to use the proprietary format. But the plugin would convert the open source format to the proprietary form, and vice-versa for the way back. That means that a lot of people that can't afford that program can use the open source one and still be able to submit things to those companies."

"Yep," Muriel said, "Plus we'll reduce the price to something more in line with the actual costs plus a small profit, and more people will be able to afford it. Oh, and the plugin works for not only the word processing part, but for all the other parts, translating it to the appropriate open source format and back."



“How will you compete, then,” asked Alice.

“The programs basically do the same things. But each has more advanced things that they do. And those advanced things are not the same between the two. Also different ways of handling things. So, those that want our set of advanced tools will buy ours. Those that want theirs will download it and install it,” Muriel said. “Simple.”

“You do know that people won't believe that you're actually changing the philosophy of the company, don't you?” Alice asked.

“Yep. And time will tell if it works,” Muriel said. “But pulling it out of the stock market was the biggest achievement. It's now a private company, so it's not driven by those that want a high return on their stock. So it's no longer driven to become a monopoly,” Muriel replied. “We'll be forced to compete on the ability level, coming up with new things to interest people and keep our lower but sufficient profit level going. And the open source outfit will be the same way. We may even share other things with them. Like, we cleaned up the code, so they can see what we did and how we did it, and duplicate the idea without duplicating the code.”

“Muriel, I used to work for a law firm that handled accounts for software companies. One of the things I learned was that the better ones also offered support of various types. Forums where people shared their problems and solutions, one-shot paid support, and subscription support. There may have been other ways, too, but those were the ones I knew. This company you took over only offered very expensive one-shot support or slightly less expensive subscription support. You might look into that, too.”

“OK, I'll pass that back to Triple E and see how it works. Thanks,” Muriel said. “So what are we up to?”

“Um. Quality, non-aggression, sharing, and support. I think those pretty much cover it. Let me think about it, and I'll see if I can come up with a wording for it. Some of it may also have to be shaped for individual companies,” Alice said, “but I think the concept is workable.”

“There is one other thing that just occurred to me. The companies stay in this country. They're American companies, they should have American workers and pay American taxes. They may have outlets around the world, and those would abide by those countries laws and taxes. But the main company is here,” Muriel said.

“OK, that works for me. Let me work on it, and I'll get back to you,” Alice said, then stood up and translated out.

“Wow,” Ted said. “Well, that was an experience. Fast, bright, on the ball, understands what we want from a few questions. How come you get all the good ones?”

“My agreeable personality?” Muriel asked.

“Hmm. Nope. Try again,” Ted said.

"My good looks?"

"Naw, that can't be it."

"Oh, I know. It's because I'm not you," Muriel said, and stuck out her tongue. And Ted laughed.

"Well, I suppose I ought to go take a look at all those potential lawsuits and criminal action cases, and see if we're needed for any of them. Can I trust you to leave you alone for a while?" Ted asked, with a grin.

"Nope. I'll have Mata with me. And you KNOW you can trust her," Muriel replied. "Of course, there WAS that feathers and flame incident, but I'm sure that it won't happen again."

"Well, not until the next time, anyway," Mata responded from her desk. "I'd hate to say 'never', since that's such a long time. And it was so much fun putting that jerk in his place. It was worth playing the 'A' card, complete with sword. I really began to understand why you are so outrageous sometimes."

"Why, Mata, am I corrupting you?"

"You better believe it," she replied

"You DO know that you just exhibited an emotion, don't you?" Muriel said.

"Oh. Um. Oh, my. Yes, I did, didn't I. And I LIKED it. Oh, dear. Am I changing that much?" she asked.

"It would seem so. Mata, are you too deep in my mind?"

"I don't know. No one's ever done anything like this before," Mata said.

"Is there anything I can do? Or is there anyone you can talk to about it?"

"I don't know. I'll check with Bart and Mark, and maybe Caleb, and see what they say," Mata said. "And I'll have to think about how I deal with this, so it doesn't get out of hand. Oh, I'll be all right. I've just got to find a way to lock that down so it stays under control."

"Muriel," Bob said, walking into her office, "can I see you a moment?"

"Sure! What's up?"

"Well, I met Alice Wilson – actually, I met her twice, once when she was coming to work, and again just a couple of minutes ago. She told me that my authority amounted to 'I have the authority to use sufficient force to keep the peace, and to detain individuals who break the peace'. Is that right? I mean, that amounts to my being the one to decide what

constitutes breaking the peace,” he said.

“Too tight?” asked Muriel.

“No . . . I'm just concerned that my definition of disturbing the peace might conflict with yours or Ted's,” he responded.

“So, if you feel you have to detain someone, and you're not sure, detain them and call us and we'll make the decision. No problem,” she replied. “Ted and I are the ultimate authority, and can take the heat. By the way, did anyone teach you how to make records?”

“Yes. One of my new troops asked the same thing, and when I said 'no', he immediately showed me how to do it. He said it's good for giving evidence of a situation. Much like the dash-cam videos the police use, these days, in the outside world. Only better, because it isn't stuck in the car,” he said.

“Yep. We use them all the time, now. I didn't know about them, at first. In fact, it was an Envoy that helped train Melanie that got us going on them,” she said. “So, anything else I can help you with? How's your office? And how do you find your people to be?”

“The office is great. Even a place to detain people in back, so that we can handle small groups. And the troops are great. It's like they'd worked with me for a long time. Respectful without being subservient, if you know what I mean. And somebody seems to have read my mind to create that apartment. That's really great.” He almost gushed over the last, and Muriel just grinned.

“That's the thing about working with Envoys, here, in Enclave. They seem to go the extra distance to make things right. Seriously, Bob, don't second guess yourself. Oh, question, sure. But Ted and I both believe that you have a solid concept of policing for a place like this. And some of it's just going to have to be defined over time, and some of it on the spur of the moment. And if we get it wrong occasionally, well, we'll just have to correct it and go on from there,” Muriel said.

# Chapter 5

## Answers and Questions

### (Monday morning)

Monday morning found Alice Wilson waiting in Muriel's office, in the casual area, with a cup of coffee, some paperwork, and a CD-ROM disk. A questioning look at Mata, and she was assured that Alice hadn't been waiting long, and that she hadn't had an appointment.

"Alice! Good morning! Sorry to keep you waiting," Muriel said.

"No problem. I just wanted to update you on some of the goings on that you might not have heard about. Oh, and I have some minor paperwork that needs signatures, and a couple of requests that you or Ted should probably handle. Some of this goes back a ways, to before I joined on with your legal team, and I just found out that you'd never been updated on it," Alice said.

"OK. Go ahead"

"Well, in chronological order, the criminal actions against the teachers and principal of your school. Since that was public, in front of television cameras and other witnesses, and because you were underage, the court decided that it could act on your behalf without you being there. Particularly since the record of the events were made public and you'd filed an affidavit. The principal was found guilty of child abuse, harassment and attempted murder, and will spend 20 years in jail. The teachers were, based on affidavits from other students, also charged with child abuse and harassment, but not with conspiracy to commit murder. The principal had been acting on her own. As an aside, links were found that tied her to Secretary of State Scot. Morton Phelps, the new Secretary, had bundled up all of Scot's papers from the office and turned them over to the FBI. The links were in there and also tied back to a Judge Adams who, I understand, was actually a Renegade Envoy. So now we know why you were targeted even before you got trained. It was Adams or one of the Renegades that realized that you were capable of making mental links."

"As for the bullies," Alice went on, "all of them were charged with assault and harassment, and attempted kidnapping. Personally, I thought the kidnapping charge was a bit thin, but somehow it managed to hold through the jury trials. Again, affidavits kept you from having to appear, as the courts, plural, accepted them in lieu of your actual appearance, and the defense didn't push the issue. Two of the defendants were charged as adults, and will spend seven to ten years in prison. The others were sent to juvenile facilities, and the facilities cautioned to not let them be in contact with each other. So, both of those situations are taken care of, and it should be a long time before any of them resume interaction with society."

"Now, the person that fired the RPG at your bus was let go. He had orders to fire on what he was told were terrorists, and had paperwork to back it up. He had no idea that it was

kids in the bus, since he didn't see any of them board, and was too far away to see into the windows. Besides, the windows were tinted. His orders, ultimately, came from Scot. By the way, when he found out that it was kids that he'd fired on, he attempted suicide. He's currently in a mental facility undergoing treatment for severe depression, and it's doubtful that he'll ever leave it."

"Alice, let me interrupt you, here," Muriel said. "Is there any chance that we can get Caleb or one of the Envoys he trained to work with his doctors? They might be able to help him come out of it."

"You're kidding! You'd want to help him? He tried to kill you and all your friends," Alice exclaimed.

"Yes, he did. But he didn't know that's what he was shooting at, if he can be believed. If he goes to judgment square still thinking that it was his fault, he might never be rehabilitated," Muriel said.

"Daughter, I'll see what I can do," Caleb said, walking into her area. "I'm trying to make friends in the psychological and psychiatric fields. It may take some time, though, since I've got to convince some psychologists to take the training, then the package I hand out to Envoys and people like you that like to get into trouble," he said, grinning.

"Oh, Caleb, that would be great if you can do it. If he truly wasn't at fault for it, he shouldn't go the rest of his life beating himself up over it," Muriel said.

"Well, let me see what I can do. I'll let you know if there's any way that I can help him," Caleb said, then wandered back out of her office.

"Wow! Who was that?" Alice asked.

"Oh, Caleb. He used to head the guides of Home. The Envoys that met the souls when they arrived, and helped them regain balance and soften the blow of being dead and judged," replied Muriel. "He keeps calling me 'daughter', but I'm human and he's an Envoy. He told me that it's an old term of affection for a female that has similar traits. He's a nice guy."

Alice blinked a couple of times, then seemed to come back into herself. "OK, well, on to the situation with Peter Schwartz. He plead 'not guilty'. Our office presented the judge with the record of the events, as well as evidence that what we do is real and not illusion. Since these were indisputable facts, the judge suggested to Schwartz's attorney that he advise his client to change his plea. It took a couple of days to convince him, but finally he plead 'guilty' and got five years in prison, and probation after that. Also, he's not allowed any contact with Enclave or its inhabitants, or to voice opinions concerning Enclave, Envoys, or the inhabitants of Enclave. So, that one's sewn up."

"That takes care of the old cases," Alice said. "The ones that happened before I was assigned to you. The next was that slander case. I think the judge that took over the case is

still laughing. The original judge was forced to recuse himself. Oh, that's when a judge is found to be conflicted in some way, like lack of impartiality. Anyway, I did what I said I'd do, and told the judge that this was a case of two conflicting religious beliefs, and therefore, since it was a matter of opinion, and the actual principal couldn't be called to testify, that it should be thrown out with prejudice. Oops. Another legal term. 'With prejudice' means that that group can't try to bring suit against you again for the same reasons. In addition, after the court case, a record of the behavior of the ministers at the gate was leaked to an on-line video site, and went viral from there simply because it was something affecting you. One of the staff found out that there's a number of web sites that seem to be following your exploits and adventures with avid interest. And they have a lot of members, as well as a number of guests that want to know what's happening with you. You've become something of a celebrity."

"As for the ministers that interfered with Fran and her parents, slam dunk. They all plead guilty. Treating them to the judgment pulled their fangs in a big way. So, they'll serve some jail time and some probation when they get out. I understand that the court ordered them to undergo psych evaluation and counseling during their incarceration and probation. Looks like that was an easy one."

"I'm having trouble finding out what's going on with the group that the President brought in. It may be simply because it's too soon. But I get more of the feeling that it's simply because it was brought to the courts as federal treason cases, and they're not going to let anything out until all the cases are resolved. And that pretty much covers it," Alice said. "Oh, one other thing," she added, "your trademarks for Envoy Enclave Enterprises were approved, including the Triple E logo. Somebody high up must have pushed the applications to the top of the list to get that result so fast."

"I think I'll have to thank the President for that," Muriel said, grinning. "Sounds like something he'd do."

"So, what else can I do for you?" asked Alice.

"Nothing, right now. Oh, wait a minute. I have a friend that is considering emancipation status."

"Fran. Yes, I know. Not about the emancipation, but about what happened. And yes, I know that she's been granted asylum in Enclave, and that you and a number of others, including your parents and friends, are working on trying to get the family back together. I'm not surprised that she would want to know about it. It would have to go as a petition to Superior court, showing that it's in her best interest to be emancipated. In addition, it should be shown that she can be self-sufficient." Mata quietly came in and offered Alice a piece of paper. Alice's eyebrows went up, "Really?"

"Yep," Mata said. "And that doesn't count food, clothing, shelter, medical facilities, and schooling. All free. So none of the principal needs to be touched until she attains her majority. Muriel's the same way. So are all the kids she brought with her. Muriel's salary is higher, because of the added title of 'leader of home'. Oh, and Fran's parents debts and ongoing expenses are being covered by Enclave simply because they're related to her and

she's requested it. In essence, she's supporting them, rather than the reverse. Oh, and in addition, while she's here, she's under the adult supervision of her Envoy, myself, and any and all of the Envoys in Muriel's security detail. She doesn't know it or feel it, because of the way we operate. Also, in addition, Muriel's parents have voiced their willingness to act in a guardian capacity, similar to the way we operate, if she so chooses."

"You say that her parents have been brought into Enclave? Do they have a place for her?"

"Not at the present time," Mata said.

"OK, then I'm going to ask the court to acknowledge the asylum status of Home and Enclave, under the idea that, since she's a Citizen of Home, she's a 'ward of the state' – in this case, the nation of Home – and is being accorded the rights and privileges of Home, and by extension Enclave, by the leaders of Home," Alice said. "I'll be acting, in this matter, as simply an advisory, representing Home in the matter. That will also set her up for possible emancipation, if that's what she ends up wanting to do. I'll get right on it. I should know in just a few days. Family court is more relaxed than other courts, so I should be able to get in and out, quickly. Anything else?"

"Yes," said Muriel. "What is your office paying for coffee?"

"What? Coffee? I don't know. Wait a minute and let me ask Beth." Alice looked blank for a minute, then said, "Well, we're not paying for it. With everybody trained, the super market won't accept our money. Why?"

"OK, next time, ask them to supply the coffee made in Home. That's what you're drinking, here. Oh, and here's a couple of pounds that you can try out on your people, to be sure that it's what you want. It's obvious that you like it, and there's no reason why you have to find an excuse to come over here to get it, much as I enjoy your company," Muriel said, with a grin.

"Oh, you! OK, I'll ask them. But really, I don't just come over here for the coffee."

"Ah, yes. But it's certainly a factor," Muriel added. "No problem. Oh, I gave Frederica the general outline of what we came up with for an ethical basis for the companies under Triple E, and she's passed it on to the heads of the companies. She said that it was met with indulgent smiles from the managers, since that's pretty much what they'd been operating under since they took over. As long as they're doing it, they can be as indulgent of me as they like. This way, it's somewhat codified, and the human employees can't say they didn't know," Muriel said.

Alice laughed, then said, "Well, I'd better be getting back to work. I just thought you'd like to know where things stand. So far, there isn't any action that you could be called for, so you don't have to plan your emergencies around them." And they both snickered at the thought of planning emergencies.

As Alice left, Mata smiled at Muriel, causing her to wonder what she'd done wrong, now. "I actually have some good news for you," Mata said. "Remember you wanted to know if there was any connection between the Renegade Envoys and the power pyramid? Well, no direct connection. The Envoys saw a way to help them, but never contacted them. They worked behind the scenes, easing the way for some of the bills that were passed, and making suggestions at various levels of the whole scheme. They never actually guided it, though they did facilitate a bunch. Basically, we think that they just wanted to do away with humans, seeing them as the cause of all their troubles. So, when we killed the Renegades then rolled the pyramid up we didn't leave any loose ends to trip over."

"Now for some really good news. Captain Zeb contacted me, this morning, to tell me that three quarters of his crew are already trained, and he expects all but two or three of them to be done by the end of the week. He'll let you know for sure when they're all done. But the training has already paid off. You know about that one drug bust he made, fifty miles from where he was supposed to be. What you don't know is that his crew was instrumental in stopping a pirate raid on a sailing yacht. No lives lost on the yacht, two dead of the pirate crew, and, of course, no injuries in his crew. Both ships taken back to port – he put a 'prize crew' on both of them so that they could be translated directly to the bay – and earned the ship and crew a commendation. And he has his own signature move. He creates a fog bank where he's going to come out, and sails out of it, like the Flying Dutchman. His crew is got a kick out of it."

"And in other news," Mata continued, "we finally got the permissions for the students in school to give them the Envoy training. We've already started running them through in batches, and your friends are being instrumental in getting them through it. Most of the kids are looking to play your 'air hockey' game. Some of the girls are looking at being the height of fashion. And some few of the older ones are looking at ways to use their training in their chosen professions."

"In addition, the field trips, even though they weren't really used for the purpose you suggested – we operated too fast to make use of them – still have given all the kids, including your friends, a better idea of what jobs are out there, and what they can do. It's also helped them understand the connections between different elements of society. And Betty took you at your word, and have challenged the colleges to match the knowledge and ability of their students against those schooled using our methods. And I've got to tell you, that they're really upset to have their best students shown up by high school and middle school kids. We're not accredited, but then, neither are they anymore. At least not in the marketplace. Now, the question is will it be accepted in the job sector."

"Wow!" Muriel quietly said. "Just, wow! Alice's news was good. This . . . this is beyond good. So Zeb is using the training actively, and getting commendations for it. And the school's working. And the Renegades being just 'fellow travelers' means that they didn't instigate the pyramid, simply made use of it."

"Yep. I thought you'd like to hear this after this last week," Mata said.

"So, what's left for this week?"



"Actually, we don't have anything set up. Even Fran seems to have settled down. She's elected to take a room in the Guest House, for the time being. Oh, she still visits with your parents, and with her mother. She just felt that she needed some time to try to find out who she was," Mata said. "I don't think it really hit her, until she acted to protect her parents, just what the training was all about, and how it affected her. She's spending a lot of time with her Envoy, talking about what she can do with it, and how she can help people. She's still considering becoming a nurse. Oh, and Mark doesn't really have a course for nursing. It's just that those that take the course for a doctor may choose to not actually use the whole thing except in emergencies. His nurses, for example, are actually full fledged doctors, but choose to spend more time with the patients, seeing to their care and welfare. More nurture than protect."

"Now, that's a major change from human training," Muriel said.

"Yep," Mata said. "In fact, the 'battlefield first aid' that he gave you goes way beyond nursing and first aid, and actually gets into doctoring. It just doesn't cover as much as being a doctor would, and concentrates on what's needed in an emergency. It doesn't really get into diseases, for example, or congenital defects, or anything like that."

"So, if she took the Envoy version of it, she'd actually be a doctor, just specializing in the ongoing care of patients."

"Yep. In fact, she took it. Went to Mark and asked for it. She's spending part of the day with his nurses, particularly when they have kids in," Mata said. "In fact, she's already contributed to Mark's knowledge of people, and especially of kids, and he's incorporated it in the course he developed. In return, he's worked with her, in casual ways, to understand her parents and get closer to the point of forgiving them. Actually, Mark doesn't expect that she'll stay with medicine. She's been examining a number of things, including training, and teaching like Betty and her crew do."

"Like internships?" asked Muriel.

"Something like that, only a lot more casual in the way they're handled," replied Mata. "And nobody is hiding anything from her as far as her interests go, so she won't get any surprises if she decides on one of the fields. And she's gaining confidence in herself as she does these things. She's growing up, fast," Mata added. "Muriel? You look puzzled about something. What gives?"

"It just hit me that some of what we're doing could have major impacts on the economy. I mean, on what people do to make money to live on, and such. Jobs. Some whole careers may be wiped out as more people get the training." Muriel stopped and thought for a moment. "Clothing manufacturing, for example. Or power, if Ted starts building those power stations we talked about. Or medicine. Big change, there. Maybe engineering and such, too. I think I need to talk to some people about some of this. I definitely need to think about it, and how we can make the changes go smoothly."

“Well, you could start by talking with your friends. They've covered a wide range of various jobs, trying to find what fits them. I'm sure they'd have some information they could share, as well as information on where to go to get the rest of it.”

“Good idea,” Muriel said. “I think I'll do just that.” And she headed back to the break room and her friends.

## Chapter 6

### News from the Underground (Monday afternoon)

::Muriel? Got a moment?::

::Zeb! Sure. What's up?:: she replied.

::I just thought I'd invite you to join us in a refreshing sea cruise,:: he sent back, with a grin.

::Uh, huh. Zeb, it isn't that I don't trust you . . . oh . . . yes it is. But it sounds like you need help for some reason, and you think that I'm the only one that can help you.::

::Well, not just you. I was hoping you'd bring those squads of yours that look like kids. I heard about a movement of some families with kids. I thought your crew might help to calm them down, some.::

::Just a minute,:: she sent. ::Mata, are squads two and three free?::

::Yea, what's up?::

::Zeb needs some help. He's got a line on human smuggling, and there's kids involved,:: Muriel sent.

::I'm coming, too, then,:: Mata shot back. ::Get a good visual. It's a big ocean.::

::Zeb, you've got your two squads, and Mata and I. Can you give us a good visual to translate in on?:: Muriel sent, as she and the squads formed up on the street in front of her office.

::Sure can. Helicopter pad," he sent, along with the visual of what it looked like, ::I'll be there. Wear your rain gear,:: he added and chuckled.

::I heard that!:: Mata sent. ::Shields to waterproof, people. He's in the middle of a storm. Muriel, we'd better provide our own light. It looks pitch black out there. At least he has the ship stabilized.:: They translated in, glowing like . . . well, they didn't QUITE think the 'A' card, but the light they generated definitely lit up the entire helicopter pad.

::Inside!:: Zeb sent. ::I'll explain where it's quieter.::

Zeb, Muriel, Mata and two squads of 'twelve-year-olds' trooped through the hatch, to the muttered exclamations of 'oh, my gosh!' and 'what the heck' from crew members. Once the hatch was closed the sound of the storm was reduced to just a minor background noise.

"I got wind of this through means that you don't want to know about, but can suspect. Nothing legal. However," Zeb said, "I told the commander what was up, and he authorized my going after them. By the way, you aren't on the Atlantic. We managed to help him understand that this ship wasn't restricted by distance or inconveniently placed continents." His grin was diabolical. "I also convinced him that we could operate in any kind of weather."

"So what are we facing?" asked Muriel.

"Well, they planned to use the storm as a screen. But they didn't know how severe it would be. So the families and half the crew are sick from the tossing around they're taking. We can handle the ship and crew. We need someone to calm the families, especially the kids. I don't have a good visual on where they've been stashed, so I'm afraid you'll have to go in from top-side and find them. That means going back out in the storm. Sorry."

"Don't be. It is what it is. Can you stabilize their ship before we go searching?" Muriel asked.

"Oh, yes, of course. I'll also send crew to subdue the smugglers, of course. As soon as things are secure we'll translate both ships to a port on the west coast, and let them take care of the problem. They're expecting us."

"So, you want us to disappear before you get to port?" Muriel said it as a statement.

"Nope. I want you and your squads to be the ones to bring the families out, as soon as we've got the crew off," Zeb shot back. "The abilities of this ship are a very un-secret secret. You may get mobbed by Coast Guard personnel as soon as you show up. Muriel," Zeb said, "this may be a bit rough. Let Mata go in ahead of you."

"Zeb?" Muriel growled, "what have you got us into."

"It's not really families, as in mother and father, etc. It's families as in sisters and some young brothers. And the crew of that ship has been enjoying themselves," he replied, resignedly.

"Oh, joy. OK, then they're going to need medical attention, and you . . . or someone . . . is going to want to talk to them and get their stories, get pictures of injuries and such before they even get treated," Muriel said.

"Yep. My crew will handle that as soon as the smugglers are subdued, and while we're getting back. Mostly, I just need you to protect them from any crew members that might be there, and calm them down some."

"Yea, and get them dressed, and try to convince them that they aren't at fault for what's happened. And some of them may be suicidal," Muriel sent. "I'm not completely innocent, Zeb. I do know what men want with helpless females," Muriel said. "Girls are targets. We know it. We can't always do anything about it, but we know. All right, I really don't need to

know any more than I do, now. I'll let Mata go first.”

“OK. Then let's do this.” Zeb said, then sent, ::Boarding party away::

Muriel and the squads flattened against the wall as crew members rushed past and out to the helicopter pad. Shielded from the storm and lit up like light bulbs, they took off from there to some distant point. A surge from the ship, and they were soon alongside a private diesel yacht that was now dead in the water, but stabilized by the Coast Guard crew. Shortly, men began appearing at the rail, handcuffed and secured to it to eliminate their moving. Then it was their turn, and Muriel and her squads did the same thing, flying to the stern and working forward, looking for the way in and down to the sleeping quarters.

Squad members peeled off as they came to rooms on either side of the corridor, and muffled screams and sobs could be heard as they entered. The last room, across the end of the corridor and obviously the 'master's cabin' was the only one left, and Muriel entered to find one smuggler on top of a screaming, struggling, crying girl.

::Zeb, your crew missed one,:: she sent, as the man was pinned against the ceiling and cuffed.

::Help is on the way,:: Zeb sent.

Moments later, one of Zeb's female crew members entered the room and looked around. Muriel just pointed up, and the crew member laughed. “OK, I've got him. Caught with his pants down. I think I'll just let him brave the storm like that,” she said, and translated him out.

“It's all right, now,” Muriel said, and sent in the gentlest forced send she could manage. “It's all right. It's over. It's not your fault. They'll never bother you again.” The sobbing girl seemed to crumple in on herself, and Muriel applied some of Caleb's techniques to help her push the experience away enough to calm down.

“I have no clothes,” she said. “That monster cut them off.”

“I can help you with that,” Muriel replied, softly, and created a dress to wrap the girl in. “Come on, now. We'll get you out to the Coast Guard crew, where you can be taken care of. Come on.” Coaxingly, slowly, she got the girl to come off the bed and leave the cabin. Zeb's crew members were in the process of helping other stunned and shell shocked girls and a couple of boys out to where they could be translated to the dining room of the yacht.

Muriel and Mata followed and found the most amazing scene. Muriel's squads were already there, talking with the victims and trying to calm them, some, and assure them that they were here to help and not add to their misery. And Mark was there, with his nurses. He was going from one to another, gathering information on their condition and making a record of it, then healing them. The nurses were getting the victims dressed in created clothing as quickly as they could, and using more of Caleb's techniques to help reduce the mental trauma. The victims would never forget. But they'd be able to come to terms with what

happened without the immediacy of the event making it more difficult.

Zeb's second in command came over to Muriel, and said, "We've got this, now, if you want to go back. At least back to the cutter. We're going to pull a little drama. I don't know if Zeb told you, but we will be technically towing this ship back to port. But only technically. I'll be flying this one, and Zeb will be flying the cutter, and there'll be a line between us. We'll be berthing at the naval station, because the Coast Guard station doesn't have enough room. The crew will be taken into custody by the Fee Bees, and we'll bring the victims down after they're gone. You may not want to stay around after that. I understand that the commander of that port is a bit, well, old fashioned." A smile grew on Muriel's face. One that showed her teeth in a manner that belied the sweet, little girl that she looked like. "Muriel, you wouldn't."

"Oh, yes she would," Mata said. "She loves putting tarnished brass in its place. She's managed to demote one to Lieutenant, and get another to resign. Stick around and watch the fun. Tell Zeb, too. I'm sure he'd like to see the Navy get their comeuppance."

"I'll have the prize crew there, too," the second said. "And making a record, so we can splash it all over the Internet. But how can you get away with it?"

"Treaty violation," said Muriel. "Plus failure to recognize an Ambassador and head of a friendly nation. We're authorized by the US government to take action in rescue situations at the request of the a US authority. Zeb asked us to be here. That's the authority. So, we're legal. And an Ambassador outranks everyone. And a head of state is higher than that." Muriel's grin broadened, if that was possible, and looked more feral. "And, of course, there's always the possibility of them trying something. And that's when it gets fun."

"You," said the second, "are a wicked, wicked girl."

"Oh, thank you," Muriel replied, and they both laughed.

Muriel took the second's advice and she, Mata and the squads translated back to the helicopter pad. A crewman was waiting for them, and directed Muriel and Mata to the bridge. The rest of the squad was escorted to their galley, for whatever refreshment they might like. The bridge was nothing like what Muriel could have imagined. The trip back to port was just plain unbelievable. And the procedure for docking was like something a child would do, but on a much grander scale. They flew. Literally. Two ships, fifty feet above the water, one behind the other, joined by a line that was entirely too light for towing purposes. They flew out of the storm and cloud bank, then descended gracefully to the water. There, the line dropped between the two craft, and they were rotated to point out of the harbor. The second maneuvered the yacht in to the dock, and the Captain followed, and they both moored to the dock with fenders out to keep from marking the hull.

While this was going on, crew members lined the rails on the port side. The Navy, for their part, scrambled security forces, and a gray jeep came down the pier. Mata quietly contacted Melanie, and asked for a visual on the Secretary of the Navy, and told her what was transpiring. Melanie laughed, mentally, and suggested that maybe the President should be in attendance, since the Secretary of the Navy and the commander of the port were known

to be less than courteous to interruptions to their schedules, and disinclined to have anything to do with Envoys or Enclave.

Zeb asked Muriel to precede him down the gangway, and as she, Mata and the squads reached that location a voice rang out over the address system, "Home, departing." This was followed by the name of the ship and the word 'departing', indicating that the captain was leaving the ship. Muriel had to physically, with her shields, push the security forces back from the end of the gangway to allow room for Mata and the squads. In turn, the squads created a line across behind her, also having to use their shields to push back the security forces. In the mean time, Zeb joined Muriel in front of the line and waited.

As the jeep arrived, Muriel and the squads switched to formal uniforms, and she headed, casually, directly for the jeep. Her squads created a bow wake of security forces behind her by creating a 'V' using Mata as the apex. Their shields kept the security forces from closing back in behind her.

"Why, Admiral," Muriel said, sweetly, "how nice of you to meet us like this. But it really wasn't necessary." Zeb choked.

"What? . . . What? . . . What? Security, arrest these children. And you, captain, or whatever you think you are, get these craft away from my pier, immediately. You have no business here," the Admiral said.

"Really! Well, I'm sure that the proper authorities might think otherwise. However, I can see what some of your confusion is. Apparently, you don't recognize me, despite all the publicity I've received lately, and the orders I'm sure were sent out concerning me," Muriel said. "So allow me to introduce myself. My name is Muriel," she said, pulling her passport out of her 'no pocket' and handing it to him. From the corner of her eye, she noticed that some of the security forces winced when she gave her name. "That's Ambassador Muriel, to you, Admiral. And we've just completed a rescue mission in support of the Coast Guard."

"Admiral, we were ordered to transfer the craft, the smugglers, and the human cargo that they were transporting to this location," Zeb said. "You were informed that we'd be arriving by my Commandant. Civilian law enforcement will be here shortly to take charge of the prisoners and victims, and other arrangements will be made for the location of the yacht."

"Hogwash! This is a Naval facility. We don't allow civilians here. Period. Security, arrest these people."

"Sir," said one of the security forces, "I think that would be unwise."

"I didn't ask you to think, sailor," the Admiral turned and said.

"True, you didn't," said a voice behind him. "But it is still unwise."

"If that's another damned civilian, I want him shot!" the Admiral said.

“Um . . . sir?”

“Shoot him!” shouted the Admiral.

“Captain, would you take the Admiral into custody, please?”

“Yes, Mr. President,” Zeb said, and reached out, mentally, and cuffed him.

“The charges will be the attempted assassination of the President of the United States, and the . . . um . . . unwillingness to recognize the leader of a friendly foreign nation. Other charges may also be applied. I'll have to check with the Attorney General for what's applicable in such a case,” the President said. “Now, Muriel, I see you brought out part of your crew for this rescue mission. Well done. Captain, I saw your evolution to the dock. Impressive. More so, since the ship you were towing made a similar evolution. I also understand that your mission was completed with no fatalities and only one injury.”

“Yes, sir. I'm afraid the injury was my fault. Muriel entered a cabin ahead of my crew, sir,” Zeb said, grinning.

“Well, these things happen around her, Captain. In all, I'd say that your crew deserves my heartiest congratulations, and I'll see what I can do for a commendation for a Captain and crew that can manage to travel from the Atlantic to the Pacific and effect a rescue in the middle of a storm so readily. I do have one question, though, Captain. Is there a reason why one of the prisoners appears to have his pants around his ankles?”

“My fault, Mr. President. When I walked into that cabin I discovered him attempting to seriously sexually molest one of the victims. I face-planted him on the ceiling before cuffing him. I'm sure his nose will heal in time. He's fortunate that other portions of his anatomy weren't likewise broken,” Muriel responded. “If you chose to attack me, I'd be happy to demonstrate how effective Envoy training is. Of course, then Melanie would have to arrest me, and I really hate to put friends in that kind of a position.” By this time the entire compliment gathered on the dock and on shipboard were laughing – with the exception of the prisoners, the Admiral, and the man standing next to the President that appeared to be one short step away from a stroke.

“Well, at the risk of your demonstrating your skills on me, anyway, may I introduce the Secretary of the Navy? He's the man that elevated this . . . person, to the position of commanding this facility. In fact, he's the one that recommended that he be promoted to Admiral. I'm beginning to seriously wonder about his judgment,” the President replied. “Mr. Secretary, the leader of Home and Ambassador to the United States. Oh, and she also happens to be the Ambassador FROM the United States to Home, and an American citizen. I understand that she goes by the name of Muriel.”

“Mr. Secretary,” Muriel responded with a nod.

“Humph! I don't know what kind of vaudeville act you're trying to put on, Mr. President. But I'm not amused. Now get my man out of cuffs and let's get on with it.”



“Muriel, PLEASE don't damage him too much. I'd like to have him still photogenic – or at least as photogenic as he can be – when I fire him in front of the television cameras. Insolence to an Ambassador and leader of a nation can't go unpunished,” the President said.

“Oh, I won't injure anything but his pride. However – and correct me if I'm wrong, Melanie – I believe referring to something as a vaudeville act is right up there with calling somebody a Bug Eyed Monster. And about as dated. No, I won't injure him. I'll just let him embarrass himself.” And Muriel promptly grew to his size and put on the panther head and paws and uttered a low growl. After a second, she returned to normal size and appearance as if nothing had happened.

“Oh, dear,” Muriel said, looking at the puddle around the Secretary's feet. “I do believe that courage isn't one of your qualities. You seem to have had an accident.” This set the assembled military to laughing again, which further infuriated the Secretary.

“Melanie, how long would it take to get the media here. I think the sooner this is placed before the citizens of this country the better,” the President asked.

“Unnecessary, sir,” Melanie said. “We can get a record from Muriel and her squads, from you and I, and from some of the Captain's crew. That should give the media enough views to splice together. Including a good view of Muriel turning into a panther in an Enclave uniform. Priceless.” There was more laughter from the assembled sailors and Coast Guard.

“In that case,” the President said, when he'd stopped chuckling, “Mr. Secretary, you're fired. You've shown an abysmal lack of judgment in choosing to not believe what's right in front of your eyes, and a considerable lack of tact in referring to your President's actions as a vaudeville act. You've also insulted the leader of a friendly foreign nation that has done nothing but offer this country training that surpasses anything that the United States military currently has to offer. It is with deep regret that I consider that ANY political figure would suggest that you might be wise enough to lead a department of the military. In addition, I'll be examining the record, actions and behavior of your compatriots in the Defense Department to determine their qualifications. You have dishonored your service and your country with your behavior, and it will no longer be tolerated. Be gone!”

“Now, Melanie,” he continued, “How do we go about getting that record?”

“My pleasure, Mr. President,” Mata said. “One for you, and I'll have these sent out to the media immediately,” she added, holding a stack in her hands. They disappeared, one by one. “These are the raw records, so you might also want to record a news cast or ask them for a copy of their broadcast. I understand that they keep copies, now.”

“Muriel, you have my appreciation for coming out and helping,” Zeb said. “I'll make sure my Commandant knows about your assistance. But we can take it from here, now. Law enforcement should be arriving shortly, then even we can go back to our port. Thanks.”

“No problem, Captain. Thanks for having me. It was fun,” Muriel said, and she, Mata

and her squad disappeared.

# Chapter 7

## As You Sow (Tuesday)

Ted walked into Muriel's office with a swagger in his step and a gleam in his eye. "Not going to work, Ted," Muriel said. "You're too old for me." And he laughed.

"Nothing like that. You just gave Enclave and the Envoy training a shot in the arm. Have you seen the news reports on that episode, yesterday?"

"As a matter of fact, three times. Once for each of the original networks. They were all remarkably similar. I particularly liked the views from the bow of the yacht, showing that the two ships were airborne. The way they docked was something else, too. Like a child's toy being moved into place," she said.

"Yep, well these go along with your enjoyment of that," and he pulled out two large manila envelopes. Inside were framed documents, commendations from the President and from the Coast Guard. "These are yours, specifically named so. You're famous, now. The Ambassador that made an Admiral wet his pants," he said, laughing.

"It wasn't just me," she said.

"No, it wasn't. The squads were named, too. And it was specified that they were Envoys. But your name was first on the commendations," he replied.

"Maybe so, but they're making too much of me."

"I don't think so. You gave the orders. You were the one that told them what to do. You were their commander. And the commander always gets the credit or the blame. Be glad it's the former," he responded. "You need to learn to accept such things graciously."

"It's embarrassing!"

"That'll pass with time, as you earn more of these," he said in a quiet, comforting voice. "I think it's mostly that this is all new to you. You really did do a great job. Your squads and Mata talk, you know. They're proud of their outrageous charge. And Bart is grumbling because I never do things like that. But, to tell you the truth, I wouldn't know how. And Zeb's second – she said she walked into the room and you just pointed up, to the half-clad body of the pirate pressed against the ceiling and handcuffed. And whose idea was it to light-bomb the rooms as you entered? That wasn't theater – that was just good tactics."

"Not me. That must have been Mata. I wish I'd thought of it."

"Well, it worked. None of the victims was harmed during the forced entrance. And yes,

there were others that were being molested. Zeb hadn't thought to check the rooms until after your squads went in, and by then it was too late. And putting Caleb's training to work on the victims to help calm them down so they could be dressed was another good touch. Mark is proud as punch of the job you did on them. Yes, you all did a great job. But you were the commander. You gave the orders that they carried out. And you got in and did your own job, showing once again that you lead from the front."

"But it's still embarrassing. I just did what needed to be done!"

"And did it with style, my lady. Did it as no one else could have done it," he said. "One of these days you've GOT to take me with you on your wild adventures, and show me how you do it."

"Well, since we're trading news, did you hear the one about the Chinese President? He said that it was outrageous that an American President should kowtow to a 'mere female child' in such a fashion. That my behavior lacked respect for authority. He suggested that, instead, I be arrested and publicly humiliated for my disgraceful behavior," Muriel said.

"So, that explains it," Ted said. "That yacht wasn't traveling south or north. In fact, the victims were almost all American citizens – children that had run away or been kidnapped. I'd bet it was headed for mainland China. Especially considering that reaction from the Chinese President. I'll have to get with Bart, and see if there's any connection."

"Don't rule out other possibilities! I wouldn't put it past the Chinese President to be playing a deeper game," she said. "On the other hand, I want to know where they got the yacht. Or the training to run it. And whether they got paid before they took their cruise."

"Interesting points. I'll put Bart on it," Ted said, and left her office.

Mata walked in to take Ted's place. "Now for the bad news. You're going to be traveling again. Zeb just got ahold of me. He pushed the last few through faster than he thought. Practice makes perfect. So he'd like you to give them their passports. All the crew that he trained. About fifty-some-odd people. And Bret's conspiracy theorists need stripes and passports. The Marines have got a few good men and women. Yep, you guessed it. Stripes and passports. And Melanie's been busy, too. A bunch of uniformed officers now have the training, and need passports."

"What? No Army or Air Force?"

"They're coming to you," Mata said. "About two hundred. We'll have them translate to the wasteland."

"Two hundred? They've been busy."

"Each," Mata said. "And everybody wants you to be the one to give them their passports."

"There's got to be a better way to do this. I need to talk to Ted," Muriel said. "At this rate in two weeks I won't be doing any more training. OK, OK, I know. I'm complaining again. So, who's up first?"

"I figured do Zeb then Bret's crew, then to Washington for Melanie and have her get with the Marines to see where you should meet them. Then back here, and we'll call in the Army and Air Force, one at a time," Mata said.

"And then, there's Navy," Ted said, entering the room.

"You're kidding! I haven't done any Navy, yet," Muriel said.

"I know. And they know," Ted said. "But with the new Secretary of the Navy and at least one port commander on board, they want to know what they can do with the training. Oh, by the way, Mata sent me your concern. No, it's not a complaint – it's a valid concern. And I'm going to work on it. I'm sorry, Muriel, this blew up faster than I ever thought it would. Which is actually a compliment to you. Your abilities and willingness to train just about anybody, and have them train others created a snowball that I didn't see coming. But your way is right. It's passing the training on to more people, faster, than I'd ever imagined possible. Let me think about it and kick it around with Bart, some. I'll get back to you with some sort of answer."

"So, when's the Navy due in?"

"When you or Mata contact them and ask them to come. Or provide transportation," Ted said. "Right now, they're in the 'information gathering' stage. They want to know what it is and how much it costs, and stuff like that."

"Then I have an easy fix for them. I'll check with the Marines when I go to Washington and see if they'll talk to them. After all, it's all part of the same department. They might even be willing to do the training," Muriel said. "That still doesn't solve my problem, though, of being the one everyone looks to to hand out passports. And it's getting so it's people I don't know. I might be able to pass some of it off to my friends, if they're willing to take on the task. They're all Ambassadors in their own right, and this would give them some practice at acting like one. And they're all potential trainers, and can help – again, if they're willing to."

"Ted," she said, suddenly shifting gears, "did you ever get the Home logo trademarked?"

"No, I always thought that how to apply it would be restricted to us," he replied.

"Anyone with the training is capable of applying it," Muriel said. "And someone's going to realize that, sooner or later, being human. We need to get it official." ::Alice, are you busy?::

"What's up, Muriel," Alice said, walking into her casual area.

"Wow, that was quick. Look, Ted never trademarked the Home logo. How difficult would it be to get it made official?" Muriel asked.

"Not bad. Some forms to fill out, and a fee. I can have the paperwork over here in about an hour, and once he signs it we can send it out immediately. Just like we did for the Triple E logo. We should be getting the acknowledgment for that one back, shortly," Alice said. "I thought you were keeping it a deep, dark secret."

"We are. Or were. It's getting so that there are more people than I can handle that need passports. And we're considering how to go about letting others pick up some of the strain. But to do that we need to make sure that we still have control of it," Muriel said.

"OK, I've got a secretary working on it, and you should have the paperwork, shortly. I've got to say, this ability to contact people and get things started right away is great. And no question as to what needs to be done, because with the mental link, they can see the whole shape of it," Alice said. "OH! She was a step ahead of me and had the paperwork done to the point of dating it. Here," she added, handing the forms to Ted. "Just sign these and apply the Logo in the space provided, and we'll send it out." Ted did so, then handed them back. Alice looked through them, then translated them back to her secretary.

"And that's that. She'll have them out in today's mail, and we'll get the confirmation as soon as they get around to it," Alice said. "Anything else?"

"Nope. Not right now," Muriel said. "And thanks."

"No problem. It's what I'm here for," Alice said, and translated out.

"OK, so that's handled. Mata, where and when does Zeb want me?" Muriel asked.

"Whenever you contact him, and he'll give you the visual," Mata replied. "I'll be going with you, with a squad, and if you're thinking of using the kids as Ambassadors, then maybe you should take them, too."

"Ted? What do you think?" Muriel asked.

"I think you've got a temporary solution, if they'll go for it."

"OK, then let me ask them." As Muriel turned to go to the break room she noticed that all her friends and their Envoys were lined up in the street, waiting for her. And she busted up, laughing. "A girl just can't keep any secrets around here!" she said. "But BOY! do they remind me of a dog anxious to go for a walk, and anticipating it's human. Grab a squad, Mata, and I'll get ahold of Zeb."

::Zeb, where do you want me, and when?::

::Any time, Muriel, and we're doing it on the parade ground,:: Zeb said, after a pause. ::The Commandant is here and wants to watch, then talk with you after, if you don't

mind.::

::OK, we'll be right there. I only just heard about this, so forgive me if I've kept you or him waiting.::

::No problem. He and I had some things to go over, anyway.::

Muriel got the visual of the area as she walked out to her friends. "Here's how it's going to be. Mesh mind, and do the risers thing so you can be seen over the top of me. Squad on the ground with me, line across. The reason for the mesh mind is so you can all see how I create the passports."

The kids and Envoys immediately formed up, and Muriel went to the front of the assembly. Flanking her on either side were Mata and Ted. She looked at him quizzically, then figured that he had good reason, even if it was just to get out of Enclave, so she, and they, translated to the parade grounds and faced the bleachers, there. Zeb's crew were there, seated, with the ones needing passports in the middle and those that had them to either side.

"Good morning. My name is Muriel, and I'm the Ambassador from Home in charge of training. Your Captain has indicated that you have all passed your tests and have your stripes. Congratulations. I think many of you have seen, for yourselves, that the training is useful in your line of work. What you may not know is that it can be useful outside of work, too. Don't be afraid to come up with new uses for it. We're all still learning what can be done with it. And do pass the information back up the line so that others will have the chance to use it, too."

"This is going to be a bit more informal than usual," Muriel said, "because I will also be doing some training. On either side of me are Ted, THE Ambassador from home, and Mata, my Security Chief. Behind us is one of my security squads. Mata thinks I look more impressive if I have a squad with me. And behind them, dressed as I am, are my first trainees and, since then, Ambassadors from Home, my friends. They will be learning how to create and distribute passports. In time, they will be helping me to deal with what has become a massive job. When I leave here I'll be doing three more presentations, then meeting with someone else that wants training for large groups of people. So, you can see, the training program has grown beyond what one person can handle."

"Now, if you, who are to receive passports, would please stand up. Thank you." ::Kids, watch closely, now.:: "If you would look in your 'no pockets' for a little green booklet . . . ." Hands reached in several directions and came up with the passports. "You are now, officially, Citizens of Home. Your Captain can explain what that all means, if he hasn't already. Basically, it acknowledges that you went to Home and back under your own power and alive. As actual passports they're somewhat useless except to show others that you passed your training and made the trip. Congratulations to all of you." And Muriel shut up.

"Well, I certainly learned two new things. First, how you manage to handle groups needing passports. You let them apply their names, information and pictures. The passport, itself, is just a duplicated template. Very good. The second, that's been bothering me for a

while, now, is how such a quiet voice can carry so well. You're literally using the air around them as a speaker. I always thought it was some sort of forced mental link, but people weren't getting headaches, so it didn't seem right," Ted said.

"Ted! I'm sorry. You never asked, so I thought you knew!"

"Well, that's a third thing I've learned, then. I should stop being a man and learn to ask," he said, laughing. "That's quite a trick, and impressive as all get-out. And a unique use of shields to act as the amplifier."

"It's not all that unique, Ted," Mata said. "Envoys have been using it for centuries. That's where Muriel got the idea."

"Excuse me, Muriel," Zeb said.

"Of course. I'm sorry. Just catching up on some training that Ted didn't have," she said with a grin. "What can I do for you?"

"Muriel," Zeb said, formally, "may I introduce the Commandant of the Coast Guard. Sir, Muriel, Ambassador from Home, Ambassador TO Home, and co-leader of the Envoys of Home."

"My pleasure, young lady. Did I hear right, that you're actually an Ambassador both ways?" the Commandant asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And a co-leader of Home? How'd that happen?"

"I made a mistake, sir. The personal shield I built was different than the ones the Envoys tried to teach me to make. It was also more effective. So they decided that the only way to keep me out of trouble was to make me a co-leader," she said with a grin. "And may I introduce Ted, THE Ambassador from Home. We have to say it as THE Ambassador, since he isn't Ambassador OF anything. Just generally an Ambassador. And he's the other co-leader of Home."

"We're thinking of re-titling Muriel the OUTRAGEOUS Ambassador from Home," Ted said, with a smile. "We never know what she's going to do or say. In one week, she took all my ideas for training and threw them out the window. Learned in two days what I thought it would take a year to do. Then turned around and taught her friends in the next two days. Twelve at once. And they turned out to be as inventive as she was," Ted said, shaking the Commandant's hand.

"We're thinking of training more personnel," the Commandant said. "Would that be possible?"

"Absolutely," Ted said. "And you've got the trainers right there. Oh, we might help if



they don't feel confident doing it, yet. But they'd be the trainers. And others could pass it on, themselves. That's what we did with the Captain. We trained him and a handful, and they trained the rest."

"So, you're saying that, when their ship is in port, I can send the crew out to other stations to train?" the Commandant asked.

"Yep. Oh, we'll supply Envoys to assist and monitor, if they feel the need, or for cross-gender training. But essentially, that's it," Ted replied.

"What's it cost for the Envoys assisting or monitoring?"

"Nothing. I decided this long before I found Muriel and she turned everything upside down. Training is free, and that goes for everything that goes with it. And you've seen the results, yourself. The training is valuable in what it can do, and be used for. But of itself, its value is in helping people to become better persons. And that, alone, is payment to us from Home. Slowly, we'll be forcing out the bad apples that try to strip civilization of all it's managed to accomplish. This crew was instrumental in finding and bringing to justice some of those," Ted said. "Muriel and her friends were instrumental in finding a bunch that were actually trying to destroy civilization. They were actually trying to return it to a feudal state with them at the top. You'll probably hear more about that, later on."

"And you say the Envoys trained you?"

"The Envoys ARE the training. It's not what they do, it's what they are. But they have no creativity of their own. That's why they chose me, and later Muriel, as leaders. We provided the spark necessary to get the training out to humans, and they get the feedback. Every Envoy, now, has the shields that Muriel developed. An Air Force General added to that by showing Muriel how to anchor them in such a way that they can do phenomenal things. And she passed the information on to your Captain," Ted said.

"Is THAT how he made ships fly!" the Commandant exclaimed.

"Yep. And other training is how he got the ship to look so good, and move so fast. We teach the basics. Others build on those basics, and send the information back for still others to use. So, obviously, we're very proud of the accomplishments of our outrageous Ambassador of training. She's taught flexibility along with the techniques," Ted said.

"And, with all due respect, sir, we need to go. It's going to be a busy day for us. However, you're always welcome to come to Enclave and talk with us further, if you'd like," Muriel said.

# Chapter 8

## More Reaping (Tuesday)

Bret's people were actually easier to do than the Coast Guard, despite the fact that she'd be putting stripes on them as well as giving out passports. He had them all in his spacious back yard, which was good because Muriel's group actually outnumbered them. Other than congratulating them and telling them why her friends were with her, she really didn't have anything else to do. So, they alerted Melanie, and met her at the offices of the Secret Service.

"The squads were busy," Melanie said, as she led Muriel and her crew to the flex room where her squads had been trained. As she opened the door, Muriel could see why she said that. The room was filled. "I've checked them, and they're all passed. The squads gave them their stripes, no problem. It's just the passports they need."

So once again Muriel explained why her friends were there, and congratulated them and gave them their passports. These were the official acknowledgment of having passed the tests and been to Home, and this crew felt it very deeply. Muriel talked to Melanie about having the Marines that were trained do the training for the Navy, and Melanie agreed that it was a good idea, and gave her the image of the unit commander to talk to. Muriel, in exchange, taught Melanie how she managed to amplify her voice.

Then it was on to the Marine Barracks and the commander. He agreed that if the troops chose to, they could train in their off-time. He stressed that on duty time couldn't be used for training because of the need for the troops at their assigned positions, and Muriel had no problem with that. He even offered to coordinate between the Navy and the troops for times and such.

"You're being awfully understanding about this," Muriel said.

"I've seen some of what can be done with the training. We had an accident, out front, here. Bad. Five of the troops you trained just blinked out of here, were at the scene. I swear they were literally pulling the cars apart to get passengers and driver out. And they were a mess. I didn't expect more than half of them to live, and even those to be in a hospital for months. They walked away after about fifteen minutes. When the troops came back in, there wasn't any blood on them, yet I'd seen them getting spurted with blood. Nothing. Absolutely clean, like they'd just gotten out of a shower and dressed. Nope. They got in, got the job done, coordinating without saying a word, and saved them all. And I'd say that that's valuable training for troops. And if Navy wants the training, too, then I'd be happy to help. Just not during on duty time. We're pushed enough without adding that to it."

"Well, thanks, sir. When I get back to Enclave I know I'll have a Navy representative waiting for me, and this gives me a way to help him. And I'll have him talk to you about timing

and such.”

Then, it was back to Enclave and lunch, then meeting with Army and Air Force. Muriel had her friends give them their passports, as she watched and monitored. The kids each followed the 'script' that Muriel had set, introducing themselves and congratulating the recipients on their achievements, then having them look in their 'no pockets' for the passports. Having been in such a close link with her mind when she showed them how gave them the feeling that they'd done it before and could do it again. And they did.

Ted came up behind Muriel as she watched the kids perform. “Well, that tears it. They'll need their own offices, now. And squads to go with them. I guess that you'll have to put up with neighbors on the other side of you, too,” he said, grinning.

“I hope that doesn't mean that they can't come over to play,” Muriel returned with her own grin.

“By the way, Fran's got her own apartment, now,” he said.

“I knew she was talking about going to Guest House,” Muriel replied.

“She did, for a short while,” Ted said. “But her Envoy 'found' her an apartment where a lot of single employees live. Hot and cold running Envoys all over, plus it's large enough for her squad. I got her Envoy to recruit five that could help her. A couple of them are Caleb's old crew. But the other three, including the squad leader, are simply nurturers and organizers. And they do a good job at it. The apartment, like all of them, was unfurnished and undecorated. That lasted about a half an hour. Between her and them it's an elegant 'kids apartment', and she's beginning to relax down. Even the rest of your friends have seen it. More confidence in herself, more outgoing, and fun to be around. Doesn't take so many things personally, from what they say.”

“She's doing good out there, too,” Muriel replied. “She told them right off the bat that she was still training to hand out passports, and not to be surprised if they found coal instead. Then said, 'it looks like this', and pulled a stuffed rabbit out of her 'no pocket'. Had them all laughing. Then went ahead and told them to look, and it went off without a hitch. Her whole group gathered around her and congratulated her. Looks like she may end up as outrageous as I am.” Ted smiled at the image Muriel sent of Fran with a stuffed rabbit in her hands.

“Any ideas for an office for your friends?” he asked.

“Yep. But the final word will be up to them. Smaller versions of what I got. Desk and casual area for my friends. Desk for their Security Chief. Lounge for the squad and kitchen. The offices should be set up crosswise to the axis of the building, center aisle with offices on both sides. Partitioned off, so that each can decorate as they see fit. One drawback, bathrooms at the end of the building. Glass front to the individual offices, but I don't know what to do about the front of the building,” Muriel said.

“I do,” Ted said. “Glass 'whoosh' doors, like you have, and a wide corridor between the

offices. No windows on either side, but a plaque showing that it's the offices of the training Ambassadors, and their first names, alphabetically. The individual offices, glass in front of your friends formal office and casual area, and open in front of the Security Chief's desk. Oh, the security squads would watch the building when they weren't there, and there'd be a guide inside the building to take visitors to individual offices. Other than that, I think you're right."

"Sounds good. Now watch it all change when the kids find out that they're getting offices."

"Wanna bet? It's already being built, and you and the kids think alike," Ted said, with a grin.

"You goof! Why did you even ask me, then?"

"Because I wanted to see how close you'd come to what the kids had in mind. They came up with essentially the same thing, then refined it to what I said. A real 'group think'. In fact, as I understand it, the basic building is already done, just awaiting the kids introduction to their new squads, and getting the place decorated the way they want. And I've GOT to see what they have when they get done," Ted said.

"So do I. Oh, dear. NOW I know some of what my parents felt. 'My kids' are growing up."

"I don't think they'll move away from you, though, Muriel. I see them as becoming liaisons to various segments of society. But I also see them as wanting to be in on the action when it comes to your troubleshooting. Just a guess, you understand. And maybe I'm partly wrong, and maybe I'm all the way wrong. We'll just have to wait and see. I DO think that you'll all stay friends. You went through a lot together, and that tends to bond people."

"Well, I might as well meet with the Navy and get that straightened out. Where is the meet to be, do you know?"

"I do," said Mata, from the other side of her. "Since they don't have any trained personnel yet, you're going to them. Pentagon. I'd say Class 'A' uniforms with bloused boots would be a good impression. Oh, and the hat. It makes you look more mature, and that might help. You'll have two squads and me with you this time. If you're going to walk into the dungeon, we want you to be able to walk back out."

"Can you give me a visual?" asked Muriel.

"Not legally. But yes. And there's room for two squads along with us. But I'll have to call ahead, and let them know we're translating in," Mata grinned at her.

"Hmm, yes. Bullet holes in the wallpaper would tend to overexcite some people. And I really prefer a lack of loud noises. They make me fractious," Muriel grinned back. "Make your phone call, and I'll call the squads. Two and three, I think. That way we'll look less dangerous. And 'Security' triangles on the uniforms. Class A's for them, too?"

"Yea. I know some people wear utilities or BDU's there, but we're visitors. We should make a good impression," Mata said, and pulled out a phone. Muriel built the image and changed it for the reality, checking to be sure there was room in the office and how to place the squads, then waited for Mata's signal to translate. When that signal came, somewhere ahead of Muriel a secretary squeaked, and a man's voice said, "What the . . . ."

"Hi! My name is Muriel. I'm the Ambassador from Home to the people of America," she said, brightly. "Oh, don't mind them. Just my Security Chief and two squads. They never let me go anyplace without at least a squad. I think they're afraid I'd damage someone."

"But . . . but you're children!"

"Oh, no. Well, I'm a child, of course. But they're Envoys," She said, indicating the squads standing in a relaxed pose that was definitely not military, but definitely dangerous looking. "They can look any way they want to," Muriel said. "Now, I believe you wanted to talk to me, Mr. Secretary?"

"You're really the Ambassador?"

"Yep," she said, and handed her passport to the secretary to hand to him. He looked it over for a moment, then handed it back. "If you want, I can show you the one showing that I'm an American citizen and Ambassador TO Home, too."

"No . . . no, that won't be necessary. It's just," he shook his head, "it's very hard to believe that a child did all the impossible things I've heard that you do."

"Well, you got a demonstration with our arrival. We don't believe in bothering with all the fiddly bits in between when we go from one place to another," Muriel said. "It's part of the training. That is why you wanted to see me, isn't it?"

"Uh . . . yea. Uh . . . won't you take a seat? And is there something we can get you? Milk, soda . . . ."

"How about coffee," Muriel said. "You drink coffee, don't you?"

"Well, yes, of course, but . . . ."

"Here, try this. Make it up just as you normally would. I'll tell you the cost after you tell me whether or not you like it, and how much your present blend costs."

"Driving the price up?" he asked.

"Naw. Nothing like that. Oh, and these two pounds are free. But I think you may want to change brands once you've tried it."

"Wait a minute," he said. "You weren't holding them when you came in."

"No, of course not. That would have been cumbersome. No, I kept them in my 'no pocket'. Like this," and she pulled a small, stuffed bear out of one. "Oh, THAT'S where you went to, you naughty thing. You belong on my bed." she said, and stuffed it back in. "That's a 'no pocket'. A pocket where no pocket should be, therefore a 'no pocket'."

"Muriel, are you acting out again?" Mata asked.

"Well . . . a little, maybe. Sorry, Mata. I'll behave now."

"Mata. That's foreign, isn't it? Where are you from?" asked the Secretary.

"Oh, dear. OK, I'll confess. Before I chose to be Muriel's Security Chief and trainer," she said, and changed size and gender, "I was Matthew. Ted asked for someone that didn't mind looking like a twelve year old girl. So, I changed, and entered the room and said 'Hi. My name is Matt . . . uh. And this girl who was twelve going on forty took it and ran with it. I've been Mata ever since," she said, resuming her normal size and gender.

"Um, Mata? Haven't you cleaned that robe, lately?" Muriel said, and handed her a small feather.

"Oops. Sorry boss. Wait a minute! That was a new robe. And this? This is a goose feather. You created it, didn't you? Are you calling me a goose?"

"Are you sure?" Muriel asked, taking the feather back. "Hmm. Maybe you're right. I just thought you were a little down." The Secretary's secretary snickered. The Secretary just looked puzzled for a moment, then covered his eyes with one hand and groaned.

"Feeling better, now, sir," Mata asked. Then to the secretary, said, "go ahead. Make up the coffee. I know, it's not your job description. I'd have one of the squad members do it, but he wouldn't know where things are. Or, tell you what, go with him and show him where things are, and he'll make it. He has no problem with image and cooks for Muriel when he's off duty. His name is Chuck, and he's a good person. Go on. He won't hurt you. He can't. Like the rest of us, he's a protector." Chuck lifted the coffee, mentally, across to one hand, and held the other out to the secretary.

"You don't know anything at all about me, do you, sir?" Muriel asked when the secretary left.

"No, not really. Only things I've heard. I was out on ship for the past six months. Suddenly, I was grabbed off that and told I was the new Secretary of the Navy," he said. "I really don't know what I'm doing here."

"Mata, how long would it take Betty to figure out what this poor man needs to know about his new job, and create a dump of it?"

Mata looked blank for a couple of minutes, then came back into focus and said,

"Maybe a couple of hours. Do we have that long? And can he make the link?"

"Link?" he asked. "You mean a mental link? Some woman came in here and asked me that when I first showed up. A Secret Service officer. Went through some head game with me, then said I passed."

"You were able to hear her in your head?" Muriel asked.

"Well, yea, I guess so. I've never done anything like it before. Why?"

"I'm going to ask you to do the same thing that she asked you to do. I'll explain in a minute." Muriel waited, then felt a tentative knock and opened up to him. ::What this means is that you can receive the training. It also means that we might be able to give you enough information about your new job to be able to do it.: "Now, I'm going to fix that headache before it gets worse, and we won't link again until you start your training," she said, and trickled some power to him.

"It sounds to me like the woman you met was Melanie Carter, head of the President's Detail," Muriel said. "She gave you the first test to see if you were able to be trained. The reason is because the training is done and monitored through a mental link between the trainee and trainer. However, it also serves another purpose. People who might be out only for themselves, that might want to do damage to other people or even whole countries would either not be able to make the link or would refuse to. They'd be afraid of someone knowing what they were up to. It screens out bad guys, in other words. I'm going to suggest that you get trained as soon as possible. And I think I can get you the backing for it. Hold on."

Muriel sent, ::Melanie? I'm in the office of the Secretary of the Navy. He knows nothing about me, about the training, and worse about his job. Can you get the President to grant him a couple of days, so we can get him trained and protected, and dump some information on him to do his job with?::

A moment later the phone rang, and the Secretary picked it up. "Sir? Yes, sir. But sir . . . Yes sir. I understand, sir. Thank you, sir." He looked at Muriel blankly for a moment, then said, "You appear to have friends in high places. I just got told by the President that I have four days to get trained and get whatever information you can come up with for this job. Are you SURE you're just a little girl?"

"Yep. Twelve years old. Well, actually, I'll be thirteen in another couple of months," Muriel said. "Now . . . oh, wait a minute. Chuck's coming with the coffee."

"Single serving type maker. I converted the packaging, and used the Triple E logo. Hope you don't mind," Chuck said. "Almost can't make a mistake with it. But I tried, anyway," he said, grinning. "Here you are, sir. Your secretary told me how you like it. And yours, Muriel. I couldn't find a sippie-cup for you, so I just created a Home mug. Now don't spill."

"Chuck, have I called you 'Up', lately?"

“No, not that I can think of. Why?” he asked.

“Because I'm considering doing my own cooking for a while. Sippie-cup, indeed,” Muriel said, and the secretary snickered.

“My goodness! This is coffee! Where do you get it? And, I'm afraid to ask, how much does it cost?” the Secretary asked.

“It's made in Home, imported for Enclave use, and was recently added as an exception to the treaty after the President had a cup,” Muriel said. “And it costs a buck a pound. FBI likes it, too.”

“I'll take five pounds, and cancel the orders we've got with our supplier,” he said.



## Chapter 9

### The Weeding Begins (Tuesday afternoon)

“Mata, are there any places around here that he can translate to?”

“Not really. Certainly not in this building,” she replied.

“Wait a minute. They don't really have to be that far distant. Sir, do you have a conference room?” Muriel asked.

“What? Well, yes, of course. Why?” the Secretary asked.

“One of the phases of the training. You'll understand in a little bit. Now, what about your secretary? Miss, would you come over here, please?” Muriel stood up. “There. Yep, right there. Now, can you touch me from there? No? Good. Take a look at me. Build an image of me in your mind, what I look like, how far away I am, what I'm wearing. Good. Now close your eyes and see me in your mind. Your mind has a hand and arm. Just reach out and put your hand on my shoulder.” ::That's it. You can be trained, if you like::

::?? ME? Trained?::

“Yes, but we should stop using the link until you have more power,” Muriel said, trickling a little to her to reduce her headache. “It won't be long. Mata, I'll take the boys, you take the girls? Or the other way.”

“Oh, why don't you let me take the Secretary, and you take his secretary for a change. You always get the important ones and never let us poor, hard working Envoys have any fun,” Mata said.

“OK, that sounds like a plan. Miss, if you'd just step over to this side of the office, we'll let Mata and your boss take the other side. Don't worry about my panthers. They're here to protect me, which means that they get to loaf along and watch me do outlandish things. And, for the next few minutes, they're here to protect you, too. After that, you'll never need it again. Trust me on that.”

And so it began. Both secretaries, one with a capital letter, were powered up in only a couple of minutes. And shields followed in the next five. Then the fun began. Mata joined them while one of the guys trained the Secretary in how to make clothes. A half hour of that, and a lot of giggling from both sides of the curtain between them, and they were not just decent but sharper than they'd ever been before. The curtain went down, and Chuck saw a problem and solved it by putting name tags on what were essentially identical black suitcases.

“Thanks, Chuck. I should have thought of that,” Muriel said. “Wait a minute! How'd

you get their names? You didn't, did you?" she said, and looked at the secretary's name tag. "Secretary to the Secretary? Oh, really, Chuck. That'll never do. Sir, what's your name?"

"John Fisher," he said.

"And you, Miss"

"Pam Handshaw"

"OK, now that's better," Muriel said. "Now, the fun begins. We're going to show you how the Envoys get around, oh and those of us that have their training, too." The next fifteen minutes was spent having them translate between the inner and outer office, and the conference room down the hall. Then came the challenge, and they were sent to Home without any warning of what to expect. Both were met by Sergeant Zeb Carter and at least one other person that they'd recognize. They came back very much subdued.

::Muriel,:: Melanie sent, ::the President would like to see them in his office before you give them their stripes.::

::AHA! You've been spying on us! No sweat, Melanie. As soon as they've calmed down and pulled themselves together. I'll warn you before we come.::

"How are you doing, Pam?" Muriel asked.

"That was real, wasn't it?"

"The most real thing you'll ever experience," Muriel replied. "And you can go back any time you want. You're now a Citizen of Home. It's an honorary thing given to any human that can make the trip, unaided, under her own power."

"Who was the Marine?" John asked.

"Sergeant Carter. Melanie Carter's father. He died when she was ten, in battle. Now, he greets anyone that comes up there, living or dead, and helps them adjust," Muriel said.

"Melanie Carter. President's Detail? Secret Service?"

"Yep. She's head of the Detail. And yes, she's got the training. And turned around and trained the entire detail. Good people," Muriel added.

"So, what happens now?" John asked.

"Well, as soon as you're ready, the President would like to see you. Both of you. Trust me, it's nothing to be afraid of. He's trained, too, you know."

"No, I didn't know," John said. "But it figures, with Melanie in the office, and knowing you."

"By the way, you are both welcome in Enclave, any time you want to come, too. Room and board free, along with a lot of other things. You'll see when you come out. In fact, I'd hope that you'd come out soon, so Betty can help you understand your job," Muriel said. "However, we probably shouldn't keep the President waiting. Feel up to a little trip?"

"I guess," John said. "I'll have my car brought around."

"Not necessary, sir," Muriel replied. "Not any more. Except for show. And we'll be going directly to his office." ::Melanie. Incoming.::

::Got it. I'll alert my troops.:: In moments, Muriel had everyone formed up, and they translated to the President's office.

"Mr. Secretary, Lieutenant Handshaw, congratulations. I asked you to come over before you got your stripes so that I could be here to congratulate you on your achievement," he said. "If Muriel hasn't already told you, you are capable of training, and she graciously offers to provide help or even just monitoring the first few times until you're comfortable with it. And I'm hoping you will avail yourself of that help, and do some training. After a few, it will snowball, and we can push some of the 'old fogies' out the door. I know I pulled you off ship, early. And I also know that you probably haven't seen some of the news casts. I'd like to show you one, in particular, that will give you an idea of what the new, modern warfare can be like."

Melanie turned the monitor on the President's computer toward John, and started the video. Five short minutes later, John was looking for a chair to sit in.

"This is unbelievable. Five minutes from the alert to the planes being downed and inoperable, and the pilots taken into custody? By KIDS? No wonder you wanted me to get the training. And you're right, the old guard wouldn't understand that their way no longer works," John said.

"And that isn't all," the President added. "This one is longer, but I think it makes a good case for all the military to take the training. This one stars the Coasties."

Melanie started the next video, and Muriel winced. Sure enough, partway through the unmistakable view of her back was seen going through a doorway, and a pirate with his pants down was face-planted against the ceiling and cuffed. The video concluded with the docking of the two ships and the subsequent embarrassment of the previous port commander and Secretary of the Navy.

"Well, if nothing else, it tells me two things. First, NEVER get on Muriel's bad side. And second, I see why I'm now Secretary of the Navy."

"The Coast Guard did ninety-nine percent of the work. We were there for rescue of the victims. It was only a few cases where we were actively involved in restraining the smugglers. And I thought the Captain did an excellent job of getting the craft back to port,

quickly,” Muriel said.

John just looked at her for a moment, then said, “You know, I’ve seen adults – important adults in important positions – that would have sounded like twelve-year-olds. You, on the other hand, ARE twelve, and you sound like an adult. I begin to understand why the Envoys and Ted felt you should be an Ambassador.”

Melanie just tsked. “Muriel, you’re doing it again. You didn’t tell him.”

“Tell me what?” John asked.

“She’s also the co-leader of Home. She’s a head of state.”

John looked at her again, and quietly said, “I can believe it.”

“So,” the President said, “let’s get you into your stripes, then we can discuss how you want to go about getting the rest of the Navy trained. Oh, by the way, Army and Air Force are working from below, right now. But as soon as some other actions are taken, their Secretaries will be replaced, too.”

“Sir, what about the Marines?”

“Oh, the Marine Corps Barracks, here in DC is already ninety percent trained. In fact, I understand that their commander has said that they can help you train people, as long as it’s in their off time. He’s pressed to keep enough people on duty to cover all the positions.”

“I’ll get with him and make arrangements, then. And that’s pretty nice of them,” John said. “Marines and Navy don’t always get along.”

“Oh, they’ll get along better when they’ve all got the training, and the dunderheads are moved out,” Melanie said.

“You’re ex-military?” John asked.

“Marine Corps, sir.

“Ah, that would explain the comment. I take it you had a run in with a bad Captain.”

“You might say that, sir. Worst ship in the Navy. The Captain was cashiered for cause, after I left the service.”

“Uh, huh. I think I’ll leave that tale until another time, when we’re both off duty. Feel free to look me up. I LIKE a good war story,” John said. “Well, I suppose we should get our stripes and let you get back to work, sir.”

“Well, that brings up the next question. Muriel, of course, can apply the stripes. Or I can . . . .”

"Watch it, Mr. Secretary," Muriel said. "That one's armed and ready to blow."

"Yea, I got that. However, I'm going to put myself out on a limb, here. If a certain ex-Marine would see her way clear to doing the honors for me, I'd appreciate it. It's time that the Navy and Marines buried the hatchet some place besides in each others backs."

"Mr. President," Pam piped up, "I'd be pleased to have you apply them, if you like."

"Go ahead, Mr. President. I get to do this too often as it is. In fact, I just got through training my friends to take over the job. It's getting too big," Muriel said. "Besides," she added, "you need the practice." And the President stuck his tongue out at her, causing everybody to laugh.

As it turned out, Pam chose fire opal for her gem, and John chose garnet. He liked the color. Then Muriel gave them their passports and the 'battlefield first aid' dump. Shortly after, John and Pam left for their offices, and Muriel and her squads returned to the street in front of her office. Ted, Caleb, Mark and Don were occupying her casual area and all stood up when she entered.

"Oh, oh. What did I do now?" Muriel asked.

"Nothing," Ted said. "We just wanted to congratulate you. Oh, Betty went to the Secretary's office to give him and his secretary their dumps concerning their jobs. It's close enough to quitting time, that they should have all night for them to open up for them. Then they'll come to work prepared to handle some of the problems."

"Uh, huh. That doesn't explain why you were all waiting for me."

They looked at each other for a moment, then Ted looked as if he were about to speak. Before he could, Betty came into the area. "I have a confession to make," she said.

"What is it, Betty?" Muriel asked.

"To give John Fisher and Pam Handshaw what they needed to do their job I had to go into what the job actually was, and what it should be. That meant I had to go into their records. I gave John the standard Business Management course, overlaid with the main points of his job. I did much the same for Pam, but it was the Administrative Assistant course overlaid with much the same information that I gave John," Betty said.

"That doesn't sound so bad," Muriel said.

"It is. You see, I had to examine their records much the way we examined the companies we took over. And some of it slopped both ways. There are leaks in the military. Intentional leaks. Not just information but weapons. And there's also guidance for where to use the weapons. And that guidance is driven by various businesses. Arms manufacturers, of course, but also some that one wouldn't think of. Oil companies, building contractors,

aircraft, ship and vehicle manufacturers are part of it. Well, basically, it's the whole 'good old boy' network that's driving the current military. So I highlighted these areas for John and Pam. I also sent the information to Melanie to give to the President. She's going to do what she calls a 'hard search' of all the military branches before she turns it over to him."

"Political links?" Ted asked.

"A bunch. Congress is dirty. To a lesser degree, but not by much, so are the state governments and the political parties. They're part of that 'good old boy' network. And they're the ones that actually want those companies back, because they were making money off them. Very illegal, very dirty money. Well, basically, they ARE the underground. Religion is out of it, except as a pawn, with one or two glaring exceptions. However, they are all subject to manipulation by fast talking people with money."

"However, I do have some good news," Betty said. "I found a way to get our University of Home accredited. We just declare it so, and let the other colleges try to come up to our standards. After all, we're a 'foreign country', and have the right to accredit what ever we want. That doesn't help much with getting building standards accepted, and such. Or it's equivalent in other fields, like medicine. But it means that they have to challenge us by proving that their way is better."

"Are you saying that politics and business are actually the underground? The ones that are making money off of drugs, prostitution and such?" asked Ted.

"Yes, she is," said Melanie, coming in behind her. "Remember the ones that the President 'invited' out here for their little talk? Well, they talked. And talked. We got all the links. Oh, and Betty? You're covered. You were acting on behalf of Homeland Security – me – through the auspices of NSA and the FBI to gather information pertinent to the safety and security of the United States and its citizens. Oh, and people, this goes outside the United States, too. So keep it quiet. It'll come out in the trials of the various individuals that were in that group. Some of it is going to the World Court, basically as a challenge. Either they make moves to clean up some of the situation, or they'll be denounced."

"How does the World Court come into this?" asked Ted.

"Simple. Terrorism. All the countries that pay lip service to stamping it out or say that they have nothing to do with it, but don't actively pursue it in their countries will be charged with it. That allows a move by the UN to go in and clean the countries up. And this is where you and the Envoy trained in the military come into play. It'll take a little time to build up the forces, but when we're ready we'll stop them, cold. However, our first target is drugs and gun-running. And we'd like your help with finding out who and where," Melanie said.

"What, specifically, are you asking, Melanie? And what do you have to back it up?" asked Ted.

"We want you to do the research for us. Get the intelligence for us. Hard evidence, if you can, but anything will help, just as you did when going after the pyramid. Where you

have hard evidence, we'll verify it. Where you only have intelligence, we'll go for the hard evidence, ourselves. We are NOT asking you to actively combat these people or engage them in any way. But we are also not limiting you from protecting yourselves and Enclave, or any of its possessions. And it's spelled out in this document, from one friendly nation to another," and she handed Ted the document.

"I hope you don't mind if I have our lawyers review this before I give you an answer," Ted said.

"I would hope and expect that you would. And I'm authorized to stay to offer information, and to await your decision," she replied. "This was a direct command of the President."

"What about negotiations?" he asked.

"I'm authorized to pass those negotiations back to the President for his action. I am not authorized to make suggestions or negotiate, myself," she said.

"That puts you in a tough position, doesn't it?"

"Not really. I'm just the Envoy," she said, with an ironic grin. "Just the messenger delivering the message. And I'm acting as the corridor for two way communications. I'm afraid that I'd have to ask that it be in writing. That clears any misunderstanding. Sorry about being so formal with this. And I look forward to visiting and sharing personal information. But in this, I have to stay formal," she said.

"Understood. OK, formalities are over, I'll send this to our lawyers and see what they say. We'll alert you when we have to be formal again. And Melanie? Thank you, and welcome back to Enclave," he said with a smile.

# Chapter 10

## Negotiations

(Tuesday evening, Wednesday morning)

“OK, squirt. What's been happening?” Melanie asked.

“You mean you haven't seen the TV?” Muriel responded.

“Oh! You wouldn't believe how busy we've been. Oh, hey, we actually had some excitement after you left, yesterday. The boss called in the Secretary of Defense. Well, he started in on the boss about treating with foreigners, and that he was going to have him impeached for treason. Well, when the boss cited the Treaty, Defense just said that he didn't care about some damned piece of paper. That he'd let some foreigners into the Pentagon without authorization. The President reminded him that he IS the authority, not Defense. And that tore it. Defense pulled out a gun, one of those plastic throw away ones that scanners can't see. A single shot. He pointed it at the bosses head and pulled the trigger. And the bullet stopped a foot away from him.”

“The boss just picked the bullet out of the air and said, 'Arrest him,' and two of my guys and two Marines took him down, hard, then marched him out. We had the cameras on, as well as our record that we transferred to DVD, immediately. The boss still has the bullet. He said that he never really believed that a shield could stop a bullet. And the next time I tell him something, he'll believe it,” Melanie concluded.

“Oh, geez! That's cold. But I thought you people had a way to tell about those mini-guns?”

“Oh, we do. We knew it was there, even before he hit the security gates. The boss said to let him through and let it play out. And it did, just as he expected. So then he called in all the military Secretaries. The only two that made it past the security gates were Navy and Coast Guard. The rest were stopped and searched, and each had one of those mini-guns. They tried to bluff, but trying to enter with any sort of weapon without authorization is automatically a criminal charge. So the boss had to replace all of them. Your friend General Stuart got bumped up, and he's madder than anything, right now. He's trying to find a way that he can get the guys he was training to come with him.”

Muriel just chuckled. “Yea, he would be mad about that. He was having such fun. But I bet he finds a way.”

“No bet,” said Melanie. “He's already got the paperwork signed to transfer them in. He's just trying to find a place to put them. He intends to do the practicing over DC, so everyone can see. Now, young lady, about you and your exploits.”

So Muriel reminded her about the air raid on Enclave, and the rescue of the human



smuggling victims, and they went over the records in depth. Melanie told her to get the record of the air raid to General Stuart immediately, as that's exactly the sort of thing he needed. Muriel told her that he already knew about it. He had also asked her if there were a way to create drone planes for his guys to practice on, and Muriel referred him to her friends, figuring that if anyone would know or be able to develop something, they would.

"You ever get that art work you wanted?" Muriel asked, finally.

"Oh, Yea," Melanie said, drawing the words out. "But I'm not going to tell you about it. You'll have to come out to my place and see it."

"Fink."

"Clown."

"OK," Muriel said. "What about the police commissioner in the city? You said he wanted you back to clean up his department."

"Nope. Haven't had time. Wanna come have some fun? We could do it tomorrow," Melanie said.

"Yea, but how do we pull it off?"

"I've got this dress. A little slinky but good for days as well as evenings turning bar stool warmers into jerks. So, you be my bored little sister. I think I can set it up with the commissioner."

"Wicked," Muriel said. "Just the way I like it. So, set it up, and we'll see what my look should be." It only took Melanie a couple of minutes. The police commissioner was delighted to hear from her, and that she wanted to help him clean out the department. She explained what she was going to do, and he agreed to introduce her as a distant cousin and her sister.

Then it was up to Muriel's apartment, and the fashion show began. Muriel was having to start from scratch, unless she used the too famous white blouse and yellow flowered jumper. Melanie offered to fix up her hair, such that a bored rich kid might wear.

The next morning was one wild round of getting dressed, getting her hair done, and just a bit of makeup to help disguise her face. Then it was downstairs and explain to Mata that neither she nor a squad would be going with her. They could come when she called, or if she dropped out on them. But not until.

Then it was off to the Commissioner's office. Melanie sashayed in like a female bomb, and Muriel slouching in after her like she was already bored. Melanie explained to him what they were going to do, and his part in it. He'd introduce her around, with an 'oh, and this is her sister' nod to Muriel. Melanie would be the distraction, and Muriel would tag those she felt were less than honest in their policing endeavors. Muriel would also be looking for desk drawers and lockers that might hold potentially incriminating evidence of corruption.

The gig went off like a charm. The men were too busy drooling over Melanie to notice Muriel, and the women were too busy being jealous of Melanie's looks to notice anything. A half hour later they were back in the Commissioner's office, and switched to their normal 'uniforms'.

Then Tex showed up. "You are NOT doing this without me," he said. "I remember the way some of this crew treated you the last time. And I brought friends," he added. "Bring them all in, then turn Muriel loose with one of us to find the evidence. Then we take them into the State Police office and charge them. That keeps them out of City court, and they'll be more apt to be convicted."

"Just how did you happen to hear about this?" Muriel asked.

"Oh, Mata told me. She felt that you shouldn't be doing this alone."

::MATA! Just you wait until I get home, young lady. You're in trouble, now,:: Muriel sent, and without filtering it, so that Tex and Melanie got it, too, and chuckled. Infuriatingly, so did Mata.

However, the caper went down without a hitch. The marked individuals were told to come to the conference room, and two of Tex's people help herd them and turn the strays back to the main drive. When they were inside, Melanie and Muriel translated in.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to introduce you to the two people I just paraded through the department. Ambassador Muriel of the Envoy Enclave played the part of the bored little sister. And Officer Melanie Carter of the United States Secret Service played the bombshell. I think you should give them both a hand for their ability to extemporize during a rather trying half hour of searching for evidence of corruption and bigotry." The Commissioner's little introduction met with silence.

"Now, here's how it's going to be. In the next few minutes, Muriel and one of the State Police officers you see behind you will start going around to desks and lockers. Locations will be photographed and identified, as well as their link to individuals. Individuals, I might add, that are currently in this room. And then the arrests will start," he said.

And, that's the way it went. Tex and Muriel made the rounds again. Tex photographed and supplied evidence bags to suit the material. Muriel found the evidence, and transferred it directly to the bags without touching it. This included papers, hard drives, and suspicious materials. Lockers were no problem. She just 'convinced' them to open. When they got back, they found that Melanie had performed much the same service with relieving the now ex-officers of badge, gun, and identification. The personnel were already cuffed and ready for transport.

"Muriel, Melanie, I want to thank you for your service. By the way, we already know who their contacts are, and Tex may be getting some additional work bringing them in. Fraud and conspiracy charges, mostly, though a couple of them are legal terms that even I don't

know about, having to do with how a court is run. I really don't think I want to know. Tex, your help was unexpected, but not unwelcome. I'd have been forced to use the county, and I trust them less than I trust the people you just took into custody. I hope state isn't as corrupt. I can't believe the number of them that were making more than their salary on bribes and kickbacks. Well, they won't be doing it any more. This is the end of their career."

Tex and his troops translated the massed assemblage out, and Melanie and Muriel went back to her office. Ted was waiting with a very large grin on his face, and a pad of paper on his lap. Melanie went directly over and started talking with him.

Muriel stopped off at Mata's desk. "Mata, I'm sorry I kept you out of it. And thank you for sending Tex. It may have been better to have him, anyway. He knew the procedures for collecting the evidence and preserving it that I didn't know, and had the camera to photograph each phase of the collection."

"You're right. And I thought of that after you left, so I didn't have time to tell you. I'm glad it worked out so well. And where'd you learn to slouch and look bored like that?" Mata asked.

"Oh, I just drew on the way I was in school before someone dragged me into detention and turned my life upside down," Muriel replied. "Ask Ted to show you how I came in that room, that afternoon."

"So. I think they call it 'method acting'. Pulling from your life to create the emotions and expressions to make it look real. Now all I have to do is find out where Melanie learned to act like a blond bomb. She did that well, too," Mata said.

"Mata, I may go back with Melanie for a bit. She's got that artwork that she wanted, and she won't tell me about it."

"Well," Mata said, "you may get your chance, then. Ted's going over changes he'd like to have in that contract. Mostly just changing words a bit, I think. Trying to free us up a bit more. Oh, and this one really is a contract. Enclave will be getting paid for it. So she may be going right back, and have to stay a while." Mata looked a little wistful.

"Mata, dearest, would you like to come, too. Just to make sure that I mind my manners?" They both laughed.

"Beast." Mata said. "Mata, dearest, indeed."

"I especially liked the begging puppy dog look at the end of your statement about going back," Muriel replied.

"Muriel, I've got to go back to DC for a couple of hours. My part is just to deliver Ted's notes and standby. So, if you'd like to see that piece, I'd be glad to show you," Melanie said. Mata uttered a soft whimper.

"Would you mind if I brought my little, lost puppy along?" Muriel asked. And Mata hit her. Melanie laughed.

"Mata, I'd be pleased to have you come with us, if you're available," Melanie said.

"Thank you, Melanie," Mata said. "At least someone knows how to treat me with respect."

"HOLD IT! Trouble. I always leave a couple of lights on in my apartment. They're off. Guys, we're going to the President, first. Then I'll see what's going on in my apartment, and alert some backup," Melanie said.

"OK, we'll stay outside the barrier and keep your uniforms company. That way we don't ruffle any feathers," Muriel said. And they immediately translated.

Muriel and Mata translated in just in front of the doors. Melanie, of course, had translated directly to the President's office. As Muriel stepped forward, one of the uniforms came up to her and told her that she wouldn't be able to go in to see the President. Some sort of important meeting. She looked around. All the uniforms had the training stripes. Looking at the Marines, they, too, had the stripes.

"Naw, I just came to see how you guys were doing with the techniques," she said.

"Oh, wow. We don't get much time on duty to try them out. But off duty . . . well . . . let's just say that my wife likes the savings on gas, and how easy it is to go shopping," one said. And Muriel laughed. "She also likes that she doesn't have to press my uniforms any more." And Muriel grinned.

"Yea, there are advantages to them," she said, just as a man brushed past her, in a hurry.

::Stop him. Check his soul,:: she sent out, as she moved toward him.

"Sorry, sir. Important meeting going on. You'll have to wait here," one of the SS uniforms said, blocking the security barrier.

"Out of my way. I'm supposed to be in there," the man said.

"Why, Senator! Fancy meeting you here. I was just telling my friend, here, that I bet a lot of important people come here. What are you here for?" Muriel had switched to the white blouse and yellow flowered jumper, and Mata had mimicked the outfit, but in plain colors.

"Young lady, I really don't think that's any of your business," he said.

"Oh, but I really must know. I mean, being a politician is so exciting and all. Makes a person want to grow up and rule the world, or something." Muriel could feel Mata wincing in her mind. "Since we've got to wait, anyway, why don't we just step over here and you can tell

me all about it.”

And, to Mata's surprise, he did just that. And 'telling her all about it' took some time. But by the time it was over, Muriel had a good idea of what Melanie had translated into. Not that she was worried about her or the President being hurt, but the implications of others being in there attempting to threaten the President was disturbing. Muriel scanned inside the office, and realized that her concerns were valid.

::Melanie, do you need backup?::

::I think so. But I can't seem to be heard far enough to call my troops::

::OK, just hang tight:: Muriel looked around further. Two men, no obvious weapons, but the President and Melanie appeared to be unable to move. One other Secret Service officer, likewise immobile. She pushed her sensitivity up a little and felt a nagging at her mind.

::Melanie, can you control your shields?::

::Yes, I think so::

::OK, don't move. Don't do anything that would attract attention. Just block out all sound to your ears. Turn your whole shield into a sound baffle. Can you do that?::

::YES! What is it?::

::Some sort of audible device that operates at a low frequency. The reason you could hear me was because I was doing a forced entry on your mind. Sorry. Can you call your troops, now?::

::Yes, they're coming::

::DON'T let them in until I can locate it and neutralize it. If you can reach the President, warn him not to move or do anything differently . . . . Wait for it . . . . OK, I'm coming in. Call the troops:: And Muriel translated in behind the two men.

“Gentlemen, I think you've just made a serious mistake. Why don't you tell me all about it. One at a time, please,” she said.

And they did. It went on for some time, but when it finally ran down they had the full story. Names, connections, plans, the whole thing. And Melanie knew what they were facing in her apartment as well. While the forced confession was going on two of Melanie's troops entered and relieved the men of those plastic guns they had in their pockets. Another found the 'off' button on the sonic generator that was under Muriel's tight sound shield, and had been causing the President and Melanie trouble and turned it off.

Melanie's troops gently cuffed the two, and asked if the one outside was part of it.

Muriel admitted that he was, and they translated back out to retrieve him and take them all into custody. Mata came in and just looked at Muriel.

“What?” Muriel asked.

“How'd you do that?” Mata asked.

“Oh, something I learned from having had to work with Art, at the museum. I just went into his mind and pushed him to absolute obedience. I did the same with the two in here, once I located the device that was causing everyone but them fits. Low frequency sonics, set up to disturb thinking and the ability to make mental links. They had some sort of filter in their ears that blocked it,” Muriel said.

“So, you think they have one in my apartment?” Melanie asked.

“Probably. We do know that there are two men, there, probably to grab you. Like that's going to work. OK, what do we know? First, that somebody has stumbled on the idea of using subsonics to disrupt our abilities. Second, that they have some sort of filter ear plug so they aren't affected. Third, that shields are not affected by the device. Fourth, that a sound baffle shield will block it – that's what I used. Fifth, that we've got another darned conspiracy. We know it's political, but where does it go from there?”

“I know,” the President said. “These weren't on the list of the ones we were looking for, before, but they were in range of my political radar. I got enough information from them before you came in, and even more names after you arrived, that I know it's that darned political splinter group, again. So, this time, I think we should just roll them all up. Melanie, did you send a record of all we heard with your troops?”

“Yep. They should . . . OH, CRAP!” and she went silent for a minute. “OK, they're warned not to play it until they find a way to block the subsonics. Where the heck did they come up with that?”

“Years ago, there was some research done concerning brain wave frequencies. But all the research I saw was focused on the effects of individual frequencies. This was a combination of them. Somebody's been doing further research, and I'd almost bet on a clandestine lab, somewhere,” Muriel said. “So, we need to find that lab, too. Back track where these guys got the device and ear plugs.”

“Well, Mr. President,” Melanie said, “I actually came here to deliver the changes that Ted suggested for the contract. My people are working on finding out about the device and the ear plugs. Your lawyers can look over the suggested changes. So, I think I'm going to take a break for a few minutes and show Muriel that artwork I picked up. Besides, there's some trespassers that I'd just LOVE to get my hands on. Or at least my handcuffs on,” she added with a feral grin.

# Chapter 11

## First Cause

(Wednesday afternoon)

Mata, Muriel and Melanie translated to the hall outside Melanie's apartment. Muriel asked Mata to build a shield into the walls that wouldn't allow any sound to get out. Then she sent her mind in, found the men waiting there and their earplugs. Then she got downright nasty. She set the plugs to screaming up and down through the upper range of human hearing, but out of sync with each other. Five seconds later the earplugs were on the floor, and the men were docile. She showed Mata and Melanie how she pushed the lever in their minds to absolute obedience, and locked it there, then turned off the sonic generator. THEN they entered.

"Hello, gentlemen. I believe you have something to tell me. Why are you in my apartment?" Melanie asked, gently.

And they told her. They told her who gave them the orders. They told her who gave them the device and earplugs. They told her how they picked the lock. They even told her who all the people were that were involved in the group, and where to find them. And they told her where the lab was. Two uniformed officers showed up, and took them into custody. Melanie gave them a record of their confessions, and they left with the alleged perpetrators.

"Melanie, I thought you had shut down the CIA," Muriel said.

"We did. Nobody's supposed to be in there. So, now we'll make sure that nobody goes in there that can't translate," she said, grimly. "You know? I could get entirely fed up with this group of idiots. We are NOT going back to a feudal society. Especially one with THEM at the top. I'm going to call for some volunteers to do some private work for me, then we're going to go back and visit the President. I think you've been working without a contract, and I want him to make sure that you're covered in this."

"Can I look at that artwork while you're setting things up?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, sure. Here's how to call it." And she sent Muriel the key to activating the artwork.

And Muriel did call it, and it came, enveloping her head in a quiet darkness studded with – the universe. All the stars and planets, all the galaxies. Each in its proper place. Comets that roamed between stars. The dazzling brilliance of sight in space. The ability to focus in on a particular spot and have it draw closer for examination. And she was filled with a sense of awe at the majesty of the work, and the amount of detail that the artist put in. She reluctantly withdrew, and gave Mata a chance to see it.

She quickly made a record of the experience, then watched Mata's face light up with wonder as she viewed it, turning one way and another to catch individual elements. Mata

watched the space-scape for some time before finally coming out of it, and returning it to its normal resting place. She was blinking back tears as she turned to Melanie.

"It's beautiful," was all she could manage to say.

"It is, that. Make a record of your experience. We'll send it to the art gallery," Muriel said. "I think that would make the artist very happy."

"Yes, and I'll send mine, too. I already recorded my first impressions," Melanie said. "He put a remarkable amount of detail into it. It'll be interesting to see where he goes from here. Oh, I got Henry and Adam involved in locking down the CIA building, so we'll be able to go in at our leisure and apprehend anyone there, and investigate what they're doing. My crew and the uniformed officers are having fun rounding up all the people named in that group. And the President got ahold of me to tell me that the lawyers approved the changes as they were, so I can take it back to Ted. He also said that he's calling a joint meeting of Congress for tomorrow morning, and would like you and Ted and as many Envoys and your friends as you can get to be there. He's also calling out all the trained Marines and Secret Service. He has a hunch that there are more out there, and he wants to roll them all up."

"OK, so let's go back and pick up the paperwork, and see what happens from there," Muriel said. Melanie checked the lock on the door to her apartment, then they all translated to the President's office. Melanie reported on what she found in her apartment, and the subsequent finding and sealing off of the lab. She also asked about whether Enclave would be paid for the time they'd already put in in the investigation.

"Definitely," he said. "If I have anything to say about it, they'll be paid double. Muriel not only freed us from those thugs, but managed to get confessions out of all of them. And no, I do NOT want to know how you did that, young lady," he said to Muriel. "It's enough that they simply answered your questions, before being formally apprehended. Therefore, there's no violation of their rights. Now, can you show up, tomorrow morning?"

"I need to talk to Ted and my friends before I can answer that. I'll send word back with Melanie," Muriel responded. "Personally, I wouldn't mind. This is getting ridiculous. Like trying to put out a brush fire in a high wind. Every time we get one taken out, another springs up behind us. If I may make a suggestion, sir, perhaps after we clean out Congress, you could put the rest to reviewing every law that any Congress has passed, to see if it's still pertinent, and if it plays fair with the rights of the people. And demerits for every one they let slide that aids only one individual or group of individuals at the expense of the rest of the country."

"I'll take that under advisement. I wonder where I can get a large rubber stamp with the word 'FAIL'. In red ink," he said. Mata quietly passed one over to him, and he laughed.

"It's self-inking," she said, "so you're ready to stamp anything. Or any one." And he laughed louder.

"Thanks, Mata, I needed that," he said, after he'd calmed down to just chuckles.



Minutes later, Mata, Muriel and Melanie translated back to Muriel's office. And, yep, Ted was there.

"Ted," Muriel said, "would you like to move into my office?" He laughed.

"No, it's just that I knew you were coming back, and figured I'd wait here for you. So, how'd it go?"

"They bought it," Melanie said, handing him the signed contract. Ted looked it over and compared it to the changes he'd requested, then signed both copies and handed one back to Melanie. "Now," she said, as she sent the copy back to the President, "we had a bit of trouble while we were there." Melanie related what she'd run into. Muriel added what she'd done, but not necessarily how. And they both told about the circumstances in Melanie's apartment and how they were resolved, and what information came out of it.

"So," Melanie continued, "I've got an illegally occupied lab that needs to be UN-occupied and examined. And the President is calling a meeting of the full Congress for tomorrow morning. He'd like a significant presence of you and Muriel, her friends if possible, and maybe both of your security details. He's already called in ALL the trained Marines and Secret Service for the meeting. It's his intention to find the rest of that obnoxious and pathetic splinter group political party and hold them equally responsible for attempted assassination, kidnapping, attempted murder, attempted gaining agreement under duress, unlawful entry – two counts, unlawful access to classified material, unlawful and unauthorized use of classified material, and anything else he can think of between now and then including moper and doper in the space lanes. Basically, they're looking at a charge of treason against every member of that party. Would you care to join the fun?"

By the time Melanie had finished, Ted was rocking back and forth in the chair, holding his stomach and laughing so hard they had to wait two minutes for his answer. "Yes," he finally managed to get out. "Oh, my! Yes," he said, as he calmed down further. "Oh, wow! Will he be having this little fete televised?"

"I believe so," Melanie responded. "He was contacting the media as we left."

"OK, tell him that we'll be there. The kids, depending on whether they want to or not. Definitely the squads and Muriel and I. Oh, and tell him that we'll go for all that party's members and organizers at the same time, and bring them in. What he does with them is up to him. But he might as well have the entire bunch at once."

Melanie looked blank for a moment, then grinned and said, "He said to tell you 'thank you'. And that you're right. Without the organizers this would just start up again."

"So, are you going right back?" he asked.

"Well . . . Muriel told me that her friends now have their own offices. I'd kinda like to see them."

“So would I,” Muriel said. “Things have been so busy that I haven't had a chance.”

They walked out and around to the kid's offices. The plaque was elegantly placed at eye level and readable from far enough away that the doors weren't triggered. All the kids first names were listed. Some with areas that they were Ambassadors for. As they stepped forward and triggered the doors, they saw – bedlam. The entire wide corridor was occupied by her friends and, of all things, paper airplanes. Each plane was a different color, and each was flying it's own chaotic flight plan. The massed confusion was startling and funny at the same time. After a minute someone took notice that they were there, and seconds later all the planes were grounded at the feet of their respective owners.

“Melanie and I thought that we'd like to see your new offices,” Muriel said. “However, if you're busy, we can always come back later.”

“NO! . . . Uh, I mean, no. We were just fooling around with the planes. We'd love to have you see our offices,” Don said. He directed her over to his office, and on the window she saw:

**Ambassador**  
**Don**  
**Training**  
**Troublemaking**  
**Bat Boy**

“Oh, Don! That is SO right,” Muriel exclaimed.

“I like having Envoys with a sense of humor,” he said with a grin. “Makes life more interesting.”

He ushered them inside, and she looked with anticipated humor at what he'd selected for decor. His furniture was more modern in design, making use of metal and colored cushions in the casual area, and a surrealist recliner that looked like it should be in a television space-opera for a ship's Captain. His desk continued the metal theme, as did his desk chair, though it swiveled, and looked like it rocked, too. And on the wall beside the desk was a large poster with the words, 'Do you want a piece of me,' then a baseball bat angled up to the right, then the word 'PUNK' in large letters in the lower right. And all this against a plain off-white wall. His Security Chief had his desk in front of the door, with enough space for people to get around it either way, again in the metal theme. Behind that was the break room area, and again the recliner lounges were like Don's. Behind that was the kitchen and bathroom, complete with pop machines and refrigerator and cupboards. The area from the back of Don's formal office to the back was more subdued, but still showed signs of his taste. There were elements of brick, and of the off-white wall that was in Don's office, but the lighting was adequate without being harsh. More warm and comforting.

"All the areas are laid out the same," Don said. "The difference is in the furniture and what they did with the walls. All except Fran's. She did something REALLY different."

"How's she doing, now," Muriel asked.

"Better. Much better. Giving her an office really helped," Don said. "Oh, wait until you see what's upstairs," he added, changing the subject.

As Muriel turned to leave, Don's Security Chief stopped her and said, "What you have done, giving them offices and titles and such . . . it's really made a difference in them. They're still children – like you – but now they feel they have a purpose, something that they can do. Well, most of them. Some are still searching. But everybody's pitching in and helping them look, without pushing them in any particular direction. If I may suggest . . ."

"Go ahead. Suggestions are always good."

"Let them add 'plenipotentiary' to their title. You and I know they'll still ask before they do something. And maybe some of them will actually stay that way. But if not, then in the mean time it gives them a feeling of purpose," he said.

"How long would it take to change their window sign?"

"Oh, about fifteen seconds," he said, grinning.

"Then I wouldn't have to stand there and watch it being changed," Muriel said, grinning back.

"Gotcha, boss. It'll be done before you reach the next office." And it was.

Each of her friends had particular tastes and interests. Bobby, for example, had pastel shades of blue and green. His upholstery was leather, overstuffed, including his recliner in the casual area. His desk was dark wood, highly polished, and had an executive style desk

chair. The lounges in back were similar, but could be flattened without an appreciable difference in height at the joins between the moving sections. Oh, and his office window sported the title 'Counselor'. No surprise, there.

Carla's office window said 'Fashion' and 'Interior Design', and the place was a riot of color and fabric. Not garish, but more like a montage of various fabrics, and with occasional pictures of dresses and suits for women and suits for men. And suddenly Muriel could understand why she'd been so good at coming up with good looking uniforms for her and her friends.

Tommy's was really different. As she walked in, he was in his recliner reading a book. And there was a pipe in his mouth.

"Um, Tommy?" Muriel managed, before he blew out and bubbles surrounded his head.

Pointing to his sign, he said, "Philosophers are supposed to be meditative people, smoking a pipe. But I don't smoke, and I don't take most of philosophy seriously." And he grinned, and the pipe disappeared. The rest of the room reflected a somewhat masculine leaning, with vertical stripes in a pale brown or tan. Furniture was fabric, and looked like it had been around for centuries.

Eventually, she got around to Fran's, and she immediately realized what Don had meant. Under her name, on her window sign, was just a white square with a red cross. Inside her office, the casual seating was comfortable and individual – no couch, for example. Her desk was stainless steel, with an easily cleaned, black plastic top. The lounges in the break room were similar to gurneys, but with thicker padding and more articulation to the back and leg areas. They'd be comfortable for her squad, yet still be capable of being used in an emergency for working on patients. And an idea formed in Muriel's mind.

::Mark, can I see you for a moment?: she sent, as she walked out of Fran's office.

"Sure, what's up? . . . Oh. Yes, she's a full Doctor, at least by Envoy standards. So, what do you have in mind?"

"White uniforms, like what they're wearing, but in white and with the triangles like Mata uses for Security, but in white with the red cross on them. Would her Envoys go for it, and would they qualify as nurses?"

"They're not nurses. When they discovered what she wanted to do, they all took the same training. They're all Doctors. And the idea of differentiating the uniforms simply by color would work. But may I make a suggestion?"

"Oh, Mark, you of ALL people shouldn't have to ask that. Yes, of course you can make suggestions. They're valuable to me."

"Instead of the red cross, which outside of Enclave has a more specific meaning, use the rod of Asclepius. By the way, this office is a full fledged medical center in miniature. The

wall behind the lounge chairs is filled with medical supplies, such as might be needed on a temporary basis. Of course, none of it would be needed permanently, once she or one of her staff got to a patient. Except maybe small children, who treasure a bandage to show that they got a bubo," he said with a grin. "I keep some around for just that reason, and her crew know what I've got and duplicated it. Oh, and she's good. She's taken over working with human women that might be reticent dealing with a man, so I no longer have to step out of the room and come back in as a woman to deal with them."

"Mark, thank you. You've made a place for her, and helped her discover herself. Things I couldn't do," Muriel said. "Now, there's one more thing you should do for her, if you can. Most doctors have some sort of diploma or certificate. Maybe even a license. You know, for their wall."

"Yes, I can do it, and she's earned it. Keep her busy for a minute, would you?"

"Oh, I think I can do that," Muriel said, grinning wider than she had in a long time.

"Fran, would you come here, a minute?" she said, walking back into her office. "I got to thinking, and found out some information." She shot the image of the uniform in white, with the white triangles on the shoulders and the rod of Asclepius centered on the fabric. The Envoys all grabbed it, and changed.

"If you're going to be a medical center, then you ought to dress the part, don't you think?" she asked her friend.

"Oh, wow! OH! You mean me, too?"

"You're a Doctor, aren't you? And don't lie. I talked to Mark. As far as he's concerned, you're a Doctor, and deserve the title. He says that you've even been working at it," Muriel said.

"Well, under his supervision, maybe."

"Even interns are called Doctor. They're under supervision, learning how to apply their knowledge. So, Doctor Fran, how about the uniform. Want to keep the original, or would you like something fancier?"

"Um . . . Could I keep the original, but maybe in white and put the rod of Asclepius on the collars?" she asked.

As Fran changed the color of her uniform, Muriel grabbed an image of the rod, and created two silver emblems for the front of the collar of her uniform, and applied them. "There you go. Now, people will know what you are."

There were tears in Fran's eyes as she turned around to go back to her formal area. But the tears didn't stop her from seeing the two certificates on the wall. One, from the University of Home, and bearing the Home logo and Muriel's and Mark's signatures declaring

that she'd graduated as a Doctor of Medicine. The other was a license to practice Envoy style medicine, issued by the Medical Board of Home, and signed by Mark, and also emblazoned with the Home logo.

"Oh, my . . . this . . . it's more than I expected," Fran said.

"You worked for it. You went out and got the training, and put it into practice with Mark. Why shouldn't you deserve the respect that goes with it?" Muriel said.

"Fran, it was my oversight," Mark said. "I know that symbols are necessary. I was the one that suggested the idea of stripes to show that various levels and accomplishments had been met when Ted arrived. And I forgot all about the fact that certificates are another symbol of accomplishment. I hope you forgive me." Fran spun around and grabbed Mark in a desperate hug. Rather than being surprised, he just held her and made soothing sounds until she regained herself.

"Now, I hate to break up this happy occasion, but there's something I need to ask you all," Muriel said and sent so everyone could hear her. "The President would like us to show support during a combined Congressional session he's called, tomorrow morning. Ted and I, and our squads, will be there. So will the trained Marines and Secret Service. Ted and I would like to offer you the opportunity to join us. You don't have to, but it might be nice . . . a way to show our respect for someone that's been through a lot to get Enclave here, and allow us to be trained and to train others. And yes, you can bring your squads. Anyone interested in joining in, meet me out front at seven thirty."

And privately to Fran, she sent, ::Now, this doesn't mean you can play doctor with the boys.: This got first a giggle, then a laugh out of Fran, and she stood taller and more confident.

"Thanks, Muriel," she said.

# Chapter 12

## No Second Chance

(Thursday morning)

On the ground floor, ringing three sides of the House of Representatives, the Marines FBI and Secret Service were alternated and equally spaced. Above them, supported by nothing but their will, were the massed ranks of Muriel's friends. Across the front, likewise elevated, were Muriel, Ted and their squads. Only Fran's Envoys looked different, in their white uniforms and arm bands. All of them were relaxed, but serious.

At the podium stood the President, alone. The rest of Congress was arranged as they usually were for combined sessions. Some had arrived late. Some had arrived with unwelcome, to them, help – found where-ever they had been trying to hide – brought in by Secret Service officers. Finally, the President spoke.

“A little over two years ago, a man came to me and introduced himself as the leader of a foreign nation. One that none of us had known about before. He bought land and paid taxes on it for one hundred years ahead. He offered us the opportunity to learn of his land and gain techniques that his people had. In all things, he was friendly and willing to help.”

“Yet, there was resistance – in this Congress and in the State Department. Resistance born not of rational questions, but of ignorance, stupidity, bigotry, hate, and outside influence. Getting a treaty ratified and signed became a chore, because people – you – wanted to be able to bomb that nation if you felt it was necessary. You wanted to feel superior, that you could control such a nation that had never shown the least bit of aggression toward you. And you refused to believe that the only way most people would get to that nation was by taking a one way trip.”

“About two months ago a young girl accepted the challenge and took the training. And, because of her abilities and accomplishments, the people of that nation and it's leader made her an Ambassador. Then, people started trying to kill her. Without reason, without any legal action, irresponsibly, they tried to kill her AND FAILED! That young girl, behaving with more responsibility and maturity than many of you here in this room have, trained other young people. And somebody tried to kill them, AND FAILED! Do you begin to see a pattern, here? Young people – twelve years old – defended themselves successfully without ANY casualties on either side.”

“This, THIS is an example of what that nation can do, yet you ignored it. You called for their removal. You called for their death. You called for the incarceration of those with the training. Fortunately, wiser heads prevailed. For had you succeeded in your quest for stupidity what you would have gained is your extinction. This is not a nation to be toyed with. This is not a nation that can be bullied. This is a nation that you can't even reach, yet you sought to threaten them.”

“They didn't ignore you. They didn't laugh at you. They didn't threaten you. They didn't say that they were better than you. They offered you their help. They offered you new ways to do things. They offered you friendship. Their Embassy was open to anyone that wanted to meet them, see what they had to offer. And what did you offer them? Insults. Treaty violations that, with any other nation, could have resulted in the extermination of the entire United States of America. And still they offer their friendship. But now, they offer it with a qualification. That qualification is that those that have taken such a stand against them that they would go so far as to attempt to kill the leader of THIS country should be dealt with.

“They do not demand it. They do not say, 'either do as I demand or I'll bomb you'. No, they simply refuse to deal with such people. A religious sect no longer exists because they interfered between one of these young trainees and her parents. The ministers, for the most part, are in jail and now facing trial for a number of charges that constitute the hate-crime they caused. That young lady, I understand, is here. Today. With us. And is still offering peace and friendship even as she tries to come to terms with the destruction of her family and the massive attempt to reunite it.”

“They do not demand it, despite the fact that the acknowledged leader of these twelve year old children was constantly looked down upon. That her accomplishments were considered illusions – mere trickery. She was shot at. She had missiles fired at her. She even managed to survive a chain bomb without even mussing her uniform or hair! WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO CONVINCE YOU IDIOTS THAT YOU'RE WRONG?”

“And now, some of you, here, in this building – in this room – have gone so far as to try to kill me. You notice that I said 'try'. I'm still here, thanks to the training that those surrounding you have taken. Training offered, freely, by the nation you despise and revile. And that, and other actions that have come to light, amounts to treason. Those responsible for that action will be tried for their crimes. And they will be convicted, based on evidence gathered by the Secret Service and FBI. I will no longer tolerate or try to discuss anything with these people who have so set themselves apart from society. You took that opportunity out of my hands when you tried to assassinate the President of the United States. That's a crime that, even if I wanted to, I would be powerless to pardon, because it IS a crime. And those that committed it are not above the law.”

“The following people will now be taken into custody and charged with conspiracy to commit murder, the attempted overthrow of the Constitution by force, and several other crimes dependent on the evidence against them.”

And there followed a long list of names. As each was called, the individual was lifted out of his or her seat by a Secret Service officer and transported to prison. Finally, the long list of people came to an end.

“Now. That splinter group of a political party no longer exists. Others have already been arrested and charged. Others that were the leaders of the splinter group, and advocated such uncivilized actions. Others that followed and supported that splinter group. They're all jailed awaiting trial, without bail. Their trials will be grouped according to the crimes committed, because otherwise it would take to the end of the next century to finish



them all individually. They will have legal counsel, supplied by the court, because many of the crimes they've committed were the accumulation of funds by illegal means. Therefore their accounts are frozen and unavailable to them."

"Does this seem severe to you? Are you going to argue that, because you're members of Congress, you're above the law? Not in this country! You are each responsible for your own actions and behavior. You may think you can lie and cheat your way out of judgment, but one judgment remains that you can't avoid or lie or cheat your way out of. Each of you, one way or another, will eventually go to this nation that you've sought to reject. You will have no choice in the matter. And there you will be judged. The most terrible judgment that anyone could possibly experience. You will judge yourselves, without excuses, without rationalizations, without exceptions. And you may very well hate who you are and what you became."

"That is a much more severe judgment than you know. These people that you've seen leave this chamber will have it easy compared to that. Why? Because they are still alive, and can change their ways. They can apologize and mean it. They can try to find some way to make restitution. They can try to find some way to live with the knowledge of what they've done without making excuses for themselves. But the choice is up to them. Everybody goes Home, sooner or later. And there, there is no opportunity to say that you're sorry. No opportunity to make restitution. And you'll find that living with that knowledge and your inability to change yourself or the circumstances will be a heavier burden than you ever thought."

"You. You that are left. I give you a challenge. Clean up your lives. Clean up your actions as a politician. Go through the laws and see which ones benefit all of the American society, and those that only enrich one element of it. Stop listening to money, and start listening to the people you swore to serve. Start doing your job, people, instead of posturing in front of cameras and lying to people. You're only lying to yourselves."

And with that, the President left the podium, then the chamber. No one applauded. No one stood. No one shook his hand. He was followed only by the Chief of his Security Detail. Then the Marines, FBI and Secret Service officers made their way out in an orderly fashion. Then Ted gave the signal, and the Citizens of Home and their squads left. In less time than it takes to blink they translated back to their offices.

As Muriel eased into her recliner, Ted came in. "White uniforms?"

"What? Oh, Fran and her Envoys. Yep. If you saw the shoulders, you'd have seen the rod of Asclepius. Same with the emblems on Fran's collars," Muriel said.

"Asclepius. Wasn't he the Greek god of healing?"

"Yep."

"You know I hate when you do this, don't you?" Ted said.

"Yep . . . . OK, OK, I'll talk. Fran's a Doctor. So are her Envoys. I found out yesterday afternoon. It's Envoy style medicine, which means less mess to clean up. And, according to Mark, she'd very good at it, especially with female patients. She's been working with him in the clinic. And her office is actually a mini-clinic. Six gurneys, no waiting," Muriel quipped.

"Oh, my. I'm going to have to see their offices. I have a hunch that I'm going to be in for a bunch of twelve year old surprises."

"You certainly are. Not all of them have chosen careers, yet. But those that have have the title under their name. Except Fran. All she has is a red cross on a white square. The ones that haven't made a selection yet are marked 'plenipotentiary'," Muriel said, then looked at him expecting an outburst.

It never came. "Plenipotentiary, huh? As good a title as any. And even if they never choose a career, we can still use them in whatever capacity we need to. And I've learned to trust your friends to do the right thing at the right time, or ask for help or guidance. They're all good kids," he said. Muriel raised her eyebrows. "Oh, Muriel. When will you understand that I trust your judgment. I have to. The Envoys back you up one hundred percent."

"With all the outlandish things I do?"

"Oh, you surprise me, and them. But in every case your outlandishness has proven to be the best solution to a situation. You know, I shouldn't have pulled you off that demonstration, that day. I know, even if you don't, that you wouldn't have killed that guy, just scared him so much he'd have had to change his shorts. That demonstration polarized the military, and made it easier to tell the good guys from the bad," Ted said. "If I'd let you go, you might even have filtered out some of the scum from the top of the military pond. Now, I wish I had let you go. But, it still worked out. So, be outlandish, girl. Be you. We'll ride the current, because it's going in the right direction."

"What am I smelling?" Muriel suddenly said. "Smells like barbecue!"

"It does, doesn't it. It's not from inside here . . . ."

"Hey, people!" Don said, busting in. "Barbecue. Come on!" Ted and Muriel followed him to the kids office, where he stopped them, grinned, and translated them to the roof. Only it wasn't a roof. It was a full length patio and pool. And along one side, next to Muriel's apartment, were grills and lounges and tables.

"Well, don't just stand there. Into the pool! Last one in is an old stick." Muriel didn't wait for Don to finish. She went into a racing dive and changed in mid-air into a one piece racing swimming suit. And then the fun began. Australian crawl to the other end of the Olympic length pool, then flip and back stroke to the start, the forward flip and breast stroke to the other end, then an unusual final lap. Dolphin style, keeping her whole body together, and using abdominal muscles and lower legs to emulate a dolphin in the water.

"You've got to see how she finishes. It's a blast. Here, stand right here and don't

move, and you'll get the full effect," Don said.

So Ted stood there as she dolphin-ed even deeper, finally sweeping toward the surface at incredible speed, touching the edge with one hand as she literally catapulted out of the water. Ted probably would have enjoyed it more if she hadn't been spitting a stream of water directly at his face, as she landed on the pool edge. And Don roared with laughter. Ted just gave him a dirty look.

"Hey, it's in my job description. Trainer – Troublemaker – Bat Boy." Ted tried. He tried very hard, but Don's argument was impeccable. And before he knew it he was laughing along with Don and Muriel.

"Nice set-up, Don. You had him perfectly placed."

"Where'd you learn to swim like that?" Ted asked.

"Competition swimming at school. The only course that I liked. Right up until one of the bullies cut the shoulder straps on my swimsuit, and the teacher said that I did it just to keep from swimming that day, and threw me out of the class and off the team," Muriel said. "I haven't had a chance to stretch out like that in a long time. That felt good, but I'm off my time. I should have been able to come out a foot above the deck. Just fat and lazy, that's me." From a girl that looked like she was all whip-cord and muscle, that was a bit of a stretch.

"How could the bullies get in to cut your swimsuit?"

"Not all the bullies were guys," Muriel said. "Some of them were girls that would have made the East German Women's Olympic team look like real girls. In fact they looked more like guys than some of the guys looked." Muriel took that moment to push her shield back out from just under her skin. It was done quickly, thus causing the water on her body to be explosively ejected in all directions, including the one directly in front of her, occupied by a damp looking Ted.

"Now I know where Don gets it from," he said, sourly.

"Oh, come on, old man," Muriel said. "The kids have just invented party central complete with barbecue, and you stand there looking sour? I'm more amazed at how they got a pool on the roof. And Olympic length, too. And why didn't they continue the patio to the end of the building? Why stop at the wall?"

"Oh, that one was easy," Don replied. "We've got some old biddy school teacher next door, and we didn't want to offend her sense of privacy." And that was the reason that Don was pushed into the water.

"Old biddy school teacher, huh?" she said, laughing, as he came up for air. "Must be you think you could beat me in laps, now."

"Uh, uh. Not me. I learned my lesson years ago. You did three to my two, and kept

trying to make me drown from laughing with your bad puns as you passed me,” Don said. “And the way that we got the pool up here was because of Jeff. When the Envoys started building the building, he looked at their idea and made them pull it back down. Then he built it his way. There's an anchor under each wall, and I do mean each. The walls between the rooms are twelve inches thick because he reinforced them like the outside walls. You notice that the ceiling in the offices is only eight feet high? It's a false ceiling hiding all the reinforcing necessary to transmit the weight evenly over all the walls. Steel struts and girders transfer the weight to steel reinforcing in the walls, that transfer it to the anchors in the ground, that go six feet deep or more. I don't know all the details. He's the engineer.”

“You're kidding! But his room didn't show any sign of it,” Muriel said.

“He says it's just a hobby. But you should see some of his drawings. And he's got a couple of programs where he can draw things in three dimensions, and even make them move. Unreal the way the guy thinks,” Don said. “He even makes models for video games that are actually used by some of the companies. Remember how he was always taking things apart and putting them together? He says it's relaxing. Hey, come on! Food's up.”

# Chapter 13

## Backlash

(Thursday afternoon)

"Oh . . . ,” Muriel groaned. “Another lunch like that and I won't be able to fit in my clothes.”

“That was good. By the way,” Ted said with a grin, “I want you to notice that I didn't say anything about how interesting your inability to fit in your clothes would be.”

“Pig. Remarkable restraint when you mention what you haven't mentioned,” she replied. “I'd hit you, but it would take too much energy to get up and come over there.”

“Did you see the news at all?” Ted asked, trying to avoid any further gaffs. “Some of the lawyers for the Congressmen have actually tried to say that the arrests were illegal. However, the Constitution clearly states that for felonies, murder and treason they can be arrested. And the Supreme Court has supported that stand in the past. Others tried to get past the 'no bail' edict of the President. But the Attorney General flat said that they were all flight risks, and that he wouldn't trust them as far as he could throw them. One high power lawyer – read that as being an expensive one – tried to get his client's accounts unfrozen so he could be paid. With the various financial charges against the person, that lawyer didn't stand a chance, and he suddenly withdrew from the case. Now, that Congress person is trying to get a court appointed lawyer. Basically, all the dirty tricks that lawyers can pull are being turned down by the courts.”

“Well, it's about time they put a lid on some of the dirty tricks we can play,” Alice Wilson said as she entered. “I was just coming to tell you that they also said that there would be no delays. If the lawyers aren't ready when the trial begins then it's just too bad. And to make matters worse for them, the judges have all agreed that, with this high a profile case, they're pushing other cases back and putting it first. So, basically, the lawyers have a week to get ready.”

“Ouch!” Ted said. “I've yet to see a lawyer that can move that fast. With the possible exception of the ones we have, here, of course.”

“Nice attempted save, Ted,” said Muriel. “Want to step in another one?”

“Well, not if I can help it. Maybe I should just keep my mouth shut,” he said, grinning.

“Actually, Ted, you're mostly right. Defense lawyers have to try everything they can to defend their clients. And some of the methods they use are purely administrative. But a good judge can see them coming and head them off, so that they have to stick to the case and not the administration. I've seen some really bad abuses both ways. But this doesn't look like one of them. The AG sent all the evidence to the lawyers, and the evidence points only one

way. And the lawyers know it. But if a client wants to fight, he has the right," Alice said.

"So, how long until we know the results?" asked Muriel.

"Well, if any of them plead guilty, it's possible for it to be over in a week. Doubtful, but possible. For the rest? One to two months with the possibility of it being longer through appeals. But I don't think any of them have the money to go that route. Plus, they'll be in jail all that time," Alice said.

"OK, now, I'm going to ask what may seem an absurd question for me to ask. What happens to the families?" Muriel asked.

"That's a very good question. And I don't have a good answer," Alice said. "In some cases, they can stay with relatives. Some of the spouses may have money of their own, and a way to maintain themselves. But where those two options aren't available, I really don't know what they can do."

"Is this something we, as Enclave, should be concerned with?" Muriel asked, and looked at Ted.

Ted looked back, and he looked pained. "Muriel, what are you suggesting?"

"I'm not. I'm asking," Muriel said. "I realize this is a complex and somewhat open ended question. But, at least some of these are innocent people that will suffer because of something a stupid spouse did or got involved in. And, if there are children involved it could be worse. I also realize that the situation could foster resentment and anger over the 'unfairness of it all' that now they might have to work for a living, or that they lost all their precious things. And that anger and hatred can fester and become a backlash when the kids get older, and we'd be the object of that backlash. So, I ask again, is this something we should be concerned about?" She sat back and looked at the two of them.

Finally, she said, "Look, I'm not asking what can we do. That's a whole different question, and I haven't seen a good answer to it despite all the poverty programs and charities in the country. I've also seen the abuses of those programs. And I figure that you've seen them too. I've also seen how people react to situations, particularly when they're suddenly deprived of what they're used to getting. They lash out. Often enough, they lash out at the very people that are trying to help them. And certainly they lash out at those they think are the cause of all their problems. We could end up with this mess right back in our laps within the generation. That's what I'm concerned about and what I'm asking about. And now, looking at it, I think I was expecting too much for either of you to answer right away. It's too big a question. People have to work out their own lives. 'The only way out is through', as my dad used to say all the time. And sometimes it's the kids that get hurt the worst."

"Ted," Muriel went on, "You remember Lotta. You've met her. Killed in an accident. Only it wasn't an accident. Her father drove into a bridge abutment at high speed. Her father used to be high up in a company . . . I don't even remember what one, now . . . but he was laid off or fired, and couldn't get work. Lotta had been in private school at the time. When the

money ran out, she had to go to public school. And that's how I met her. Her clothes were different than the rest of the kids in school. Her looks were different. She was a target. So, the rest of my friends and I banded around her and tried to protect her from the bullies. Things weren't good for the family. Her mother had to go to work, and the only work she could get was low paying. Her father kept trying to find a job, any job. But nobody would hire him. And he started drinking. There was bitterness between her mother and her father – she blamed him for loosing his job, and he blamed her for spending too much. And he drank more. Then he became abusive, hitting his wife and his daughter. For Lotta, it was like being a mouse in a room full of cats. Then, one day, he picked her up from school. He drove up onto the expressway and got the car up to ninety miles an hour, and aimed for a bridge abutment.”

“I've seen backlash. I've seen what this kind of trouble can do to a family. There's more than once when I'd just held Lotta and let her cry, because there was nothing else that I could do,” Muriel said. “What are the families of these people going to feel like, tomorrow – next week – next year. That's what concerns me. Where is the backlash going to strike, and is it something that we need to be concerned with?”

“Woof!” Ted said. “OK, now I understand what you're trying to say. And I don't have an answer. I'm not sure there is one. It may be another case of what your dad says. 'The only way out is through.' You're saying that we may have just created the very thing we were trying to stop. OK, I'll think about it. And I'll get others to think about it. And, if nothing else, we'll be prepared to keep an eye on the problem and maybe catch it before it gets out of hand.”

“OK,” Muriel said. “That's all I can ask for.” Alice was just sitting there, her mouth open, looking from one to the other, as if she were afraid to move.

“Alice? Are you all right?” Muriel asked.

She blinked a couple of times, then said, “Are you sure you're only twelve? I've heard adults that couldn't begin to understand the question, much less ask it.”

“Every one of those kids, next door, have a story. Most of them aren't very nice stories. At first, I was a sympathetic ear. As time went on, I found little ways to make their day brighter, to make them happy for a few moments. When Ted first offered me the training, I thought it might be a way to fix things for everyone. Then I realized that nothing could fix things for everyone. But it doesn't stop me from trying to correct some of the problems along the way,” Muriel said. “Besides, it's fun to put down bullies.”

“I think I know what's troubling Alice,” Ted said. “She's just seen a high level meeting of the leaders of home, and not just Muriel and Ted talking. It can be a bit overwhelming watching you change gears like that. I'm still getting used to it. It had to be a shock to her. Much like the shock to me when you made the link to me and explained that you'd done the same to Mata. Or when you trained twelve friends and a curmudgeon of an Envoy all at one time. Or any of the other things you've done. You were making policy right from the beginning. 'Don't say it can't be done, because Muriel will go out and do it.' And if Muriel can

do it, then anybody can, as Melanie proved, soon after.”

“Oh, come on. I'm not that bad, am I?” asked Muriel.

“Bad? No. Good? Yes,” Ted said. “Mostly you change policy through your actions. But a few times I've seen you take things apart and put them back together again. Ideas, not objects. And how you do it still eludes me. It's just that this time you did it in front of an innocent victim – I mean bystander.”

“She's sitting,” Muriel said, with a straight face.

“You know what I mean, young lady. Behave yourself.”

“The last time I was told that it meant 'behave like myself'. And I did. And you see where that got me,” Muriel said. “Two people fired by the President, one from the Secret Service, and a reputation of being dangerous. I just don't understand it. Sweet, innocent, little old me? Dangerous? Can't be. I'm too young.”

“Well, as much as I'd tend to agree with such a pretty face, the plain truth is that you're the type that goes for the throat, then hangs on until something suffocates. Remember, I've seen you in action,” said the friendly drawl of Tex.

“Your comments and opinion are out of order. And besides, I have it on good authority that I'm sweet and innocent. Melanie told me so. Hi, Tex,” Muriel said.

“Melanie is disqualified as an expert witness on account a she's another gal-danged female and you all stick together. I just came by to show Ted the changes they wanted in the uniform. They wanted it changed to a shirt and tie. A TIE of all things. Something to hang a cop with.”

“Make it a part of the shirt. They'll never know. And loosen the collar a bit. You look like your choking to death,” Muriel said.

“I'll still look like a gal-danged New York State Trooper. At least the tie isn't purple.” He made the adjustments, and Ted looked it over.

“Yea, I can live with that,” he said. “It lacks the dress quality of what you had, but out here in the West, maybe that's for the best.”

“They called me up to the Commissioner's office. Me and the sergeant. You should have seen his eyes when I made the changes right in front of him,” Tex said. “I thought they were gonna fall right out of his head. Kinda got the point across that I'm trained, though. Then they went and really torqued my butt. Put this shiny stuff on my collar and the sergeant's nose out of joint. Said I was now my own department. Even gave me a desk. I still get to call on any of the troops I've trained in an emergency. They called me a danged liaison, and said I should wear the uniform all the time. They did approve the State Police seal on the belt buckle, though.”



Poor Alice just looked between Ted, Muriel and Tex, shook her head, and muttered, "They're ALL totally around the bend." Which set everyone to laughing.

"Now," Tex said, "I got one more confession to make." And he put on his hat. Only it wasn't the one he'd had before. This was flat, wide brimmed, with an indentation in the center-line of the crown and 'dimples' on either side of that. A gray hat-band was overlayed in front with a leather strap that went through the brim and hung down behind. "At least it's gray."

"Tex," said Muriel, "I think it looks very nice. Makes you look a foot taller, and very intimidating."

"At least it isn't one of those campaign hats," Ted said. "I can live with something like that. Have you shown Bob, yet?"

"Nope."

"Yep," said a voice behind him. "Very pretty. Almost look like you're a real cop."

"Oh, GAD! That's all I need. Someone calling me an almost cop. Man! That's worse than being called a rent-a-cop!"

"So," Bob said, "you're supposed to liaise with me, huh? I suppose that means that you won't have any more reason to bother these good people."

"To heck with that," Tex replied. "They're friends. If I'm here, o' course I'll see them. Unless I'm pressed for time, or something."

"Good!" Bob said. "Then that's settled. Tex, let's settle something right now, so there's no confusion in the future. I'll work with you. I'll hand off alleged criminals for you to incarcerate. I'll do whatever I can to maintain peace between Enclave and the State Police. But one thing is absolute. If you get orders from them to do something, do it. They're above me. They're my bosses, and I won't cross them. Just try to keep me informed when that happens. I might argue with them, but I don't want any arguments with you. Got it?"

"Oh, man. I thought this was going to go the other way," Tex said.

"Nope. I had some times when I gave troops an order, and those above me gave conflicting orders, and I didn't find out until afterward. And it was a mess. I don't like things like that happening. That's why the speech."

"Man, I can live with that. It might have to be a mental link rather than face to face, though, if I'm pushed," Tex said.

"No problem. As long as I know, I won't be upset. I understand that we've had good relations with the State Police up to now, and I'd like to keep it that way," Bob said, and stuck

out his hand. Tex took it, and they both grinned.

“Now, why can't people in the outside world work together like that?” Alice asked.

“Because they're too busy empire building or afraid someone going to take over their turf. Speaking of which – Tex, you do realize that in that uniform you can't go arresting people in here?” asked Bob.

“Yep. But Ted suggested something to get around that, before you came on board. I'd still defer to you – sir – but this is what he suggested,” and Tex changed the buckle and badge to the Home logo.

“Yep. That'd do it. That way it keeps it in here, and not a turf fight,” Bob said. “I really hate turf fights. Nothing ever gets done to anyone's satisfaction in them. Tex, looks like you and I are on the same page. And you're welcome in my office any time, even just to shoot the breeze, tell war stories and drink coffee.”

“Now, that's mighty kind of you, sir. And I'll keep that in mind. It always pays to have more friends. Especially when a guy has to work with them.”

“I think I'd better get out of here,” Alice said, “before I get corrupted. I can't believe you people!” And she stood up and left.

“I really ought to leave, too,” Tex said. “Nearly time to punch out.”

“I hope not your old sergeant,” Bob said.

“Oh, no. Once he realized that I wasn't being jumped over him he had no problem with my promotion. I think he was kinda glad to get rid of me,” Tex said with a grin.

“I can't imagine why,” said Muriel.

“Neither can I,” said Tex, and stuck his tongue out at her.

# Chapter 14

## Threats and Promises (Friday morning)

"Good morning, Mata. What's going on today?" Muriel asked.

"Nothing, right now. Why?"

"Oh, I thought I'd see if Caleb was in, and find out how things are going with him."

"Ah, well, wish him my best," Mata said.

"I will. Be back in a bit." And Muriel walked out and down the street toward Caleb's office.

"Hey, little girl, wait a minute," the voice rang out from behind her. At least it wasn't said in a disparaging way. Muriel turned and waited.

"Hey, would you happen to know if the bosses are in?" one of the men said.

"Why, yes. Yes they are. What do you need?" Muriel asked.

"Well," the man said, "there's a little matter of some merchandise that we need to discuss with them. It seems that it somehow came into their possession by mistake."

"Ah, well, we can't have that, can we." As she finished speaking, the second one whispered something in the first one's ear.

"Tell you what, why don't you just come with us, and we'll introduce you to our boss, and he can tell you all about it," the man said, and moved toward her. Another movement, from behind the two men was encouraging.

"Oh, I think I can find him for myself," she said. "Just give me a name and location, and I'll be happy to meet with him." He lunged and grabbed for her. A futile exercise that simply had him stuck on her, at least figuratively speaking. The second man turned to run, and discovered that that option had been closed to him. Two of Enclave's new police force were there to take him.

"Would you like to release this one to us, Muriel?" ask one of the Envoy police.

"Not just yet, I think. Someone sent him to find me. Someone who feels that we owe him for some merchandise. And the only 'merchandise' I can think of that it might be is those victims of human smuggling and kidnapping that we helped rescue. So, now he's going to tell us who sent him, and where he is. And I'll pay him a little visit," Muriel said.

"Miss," the man said, "I can't. It would mean my death."

"Oh, well, we can accomplish that, too," Muriel said, casually.

"But . . . everyone knows that Envoys can't kill."

"But I'm not an Envoy," she replied. "And I'm under no such restriction. Now, we can do this the hard way or the easy way. The last man that chose the easy way ended up being mind reamed with a resulting headache. The hard way is just that I ask you questions, and you answer them truthfully. It's much easier for me to just go in and get the information, but it's your choice."

"Muriel? What's going on?" Ted said, coming out of his office.

"Oh, just a wannabe kidnapper. He wants me to meet his boss, but now he doesn't want to tell me who he is or where he is," said Muriel.

"Ah. Well, you did the last one, and you're a gentle person. Let me have this one. I'm not as nice as you are. Of course, he might end up a drooling idiot, but the only difference that I can see in that is that he'd be drooling," Ted said.

"No, miss, please! . . ."

"Let's see how well he can answer my questions, first, Ted. If he tries to hide anything or lie to me, THEN I'll let you have him," Muriel said, reflectively.

And he talked. And talked. Names, places, operations, number of sicarios and how many his boss normally kept around, expected visitors. The list was long. It also included the fact that his boss intended to take back the victims rescued from the yacht. Muriel sent a quick message to Zeb to find out where they were. He reported that most of them had been returned home. Ted asked Envoys to locate the children, and protect them, and Envoys from Home immediately streamed out to find them. And finally, it was over, and Muriel released the man to Bob's policeman.

"Well, Ted, how do you think we should do this?" asked Muriel.

"I'll take the outfit here, in America. It's spread all over, and some of them will have to be tracked down. You've got the harder part. Going to a different country and picking up the boss, there. And, since he's expecting a visit from the local chief of police, you may as well pick him up, too. If you run into trouble, holler for help and you'll be flooded with Envoys," Ted said. "We would have picked up this bunch before, but the Coast Guard and FBI couldn't get this information out of any of the crew or captain of that yacht."

"OK. I should be all right, though. Unless I end up picking up so many people that I can't handle them with my squads. Where do you want them?" she asked.

"The warehouse prison. We finally cleared it out. I'll alert Bob that they're coming in, and ask Henry or Adam for assistance, and tell them to check with Bob," Ted said.

"Then I'll be off in a few minutes," she said, and went to tell Mata what was up. Mata insisted that it be all four squads and herself, and that Fred could lock down the office when they left.

A visual of the building and grounds showed that there were numerous guards, and that ringing the grounds and shielding the entire area seemed to be the best plan. The squads would seize weapons and destroy them, and put the guards under shields for transport. When the main shield was up and utilities cut to the building, Muriel would go in and get the boss and any visitors.

They went in, invisible, and took up stations around the property. It was one of those cold, wet, downpour days that just never seem to end. In the dark they almost wouldn't have had to be invisible. The rain sheeted off the shields as they stood, ten feet in the air, waiting for the signal. A truck lumbered up the dirt road, gears grinding as the driver attempted to shift to gain better traction. It passed the gate, and Muriel appeared, six feet up behind it, glowing brightly enough to show the road ahead for the truck. The shield went up, cutting off all utilities, and her squads and Mata appeared the same way, lighting up the entire compound.

Shots rang out, and the Envoys were kept busy grabbing guns and putting guards under shield as Muriel did the same with the driver and passenger in the truck. When they were all accounted for and standing in the mud, unable to move, Muriel began walking in the air toward the building, scanning the interior as she went. She found that the building was a home as well as an office, and that the boss's family were inside, a wife and three children, panicked by the loss of light and the shooting that had suddenly stopped.

What drew Muriel's attention was that the wife had a computer and file cabinets. And the husband didn't. ::I need a little help, here,:: she sent to home, and instantly fifteen Envoys were at her side. Three of them went to the children. The rest she had strip the house of computers, file cabinets and any files, and look for safes and empty them. Also desk drawers or any other place that evidence might be held.

When Muriel got back to Enclave, she found that the sicarios and their boss and his wife had already been stripped and put in cells that contained bed, toilet, sink and their new 'uniforms'. She also found that one cell was being used to house any evidence collected at the building. Other cells were quickly being filled with Ted's collection. What wasn't in evidence were the three children. She puzzled over that as she left the prison.

Until she walked into her office and found the front of it studiously busy. While in the back was a huddle of her off-duty squads, three new Envoys . . . and the children. She looked at Mata who was busy trying very hard to look innocent. Muriel raised one eyebrow.

"What! . . . We couldn't put them in prison cells. And Mark's getting a place ready for them in the Clinic. And the Envoys that brought them in have volunteered to take care of

them until we find out what to do with them. So, it's only for a little while," Mata said, defensively, like a kid caught doing something naughty. And that started Muriel laughing.

"Well," she said, "I might as well go do what I was going to do when this all blew up. What was I going to do? Oh, Caleb. Hospice!"

"Well, actually," Mata said, "you might as well wait until after lunch, now. By then the children should be cleared out, and your head, too."

"Funny, Mata. Just hilarious. I'm almost laughing," Muriel said with a straight face, which started Mata laughing, and that got Muriel going. "OK, I'll wait until after lunch, then."

"Did someone mention lunch?"

Muriel spun around. "Caleb! I was going to come over after lunch. Well, actually I was going to come over this morning, but I kinda got sidetracked." They moved into her casual area, and placed orders for lunch. Chuck insisted that she have milk with at least two meals.

"So I heard," he said. "No matter. Nothing that couldn't wait. I just wanted to update you on a few things. Hospice. Clyde's running it, now. In fact, he set it up – he talked to Mark about how the Clinic was set up, and did something like it with more home-like look and feel to it. Recruited Envoys from Home, got them the medical training and made sure they had both my training and the counseling training that Bobby got. Oh, Clyde got them, too, of course. Along with patient rooms, he has a recreational area where those that are still able can go and socialize with others or play games, or whatever. He's really changed since you got ahold of him. Become more compassionate and understanding of humans. In a sense, I've turned into a recruiter for him. And the costs are down below what others charge, so it's available to a wider range of the population."

"Then there's my work with the churches," he added. "Floyd and I sat down and hashed out what I could and couldn't say, and what his concerns had been, and stuff like that. Pretty much what I did that first night, but packaged for a larger audience. Oh, and I got that counseling package, too, and that makes it easier to know what to say, and what people think. Then Floyd passed the word to other churches in his denomination, too, and suddenly I was getting two or three sessions a month with either replacing the sermon or doing Sunday schools. And it's going well. Between learning that they need to judge themselves, and understanding that there's nothing to fear in going Home, people are relaxing down and behaving better. I'm even branching out to other religions. Some of them are antagonistic toward me. But most seem encouraged by my message. I may have to train others to do this, if it expands any further."

"That's great, Caleb," Muriel said. "I honestly didn't know how it would go over, or even if you'd have a chance to try."

"Well, that first night with Floyd pretty much sold the idea to him. I kept it neutral and personal, and both he and she accepted what I said. She, because it directly affected her. And he because he could see that I was working very hard at not ruffling any religious

feathers. You know,” Caleb said, changing the subject, “the thing I like about visiting your office is that it's like a celebration of life in here. Ted's is almost all business, with only a little kidding around. Yours is vibrant – people doing things and interacting with humor – actively looking for new things and new ways of doing things. It's refreshing. I've spent too much time with death. Oh, it's a part of life and all, but after centuries of doing one very necessary thing, it's refreshing to see the other side of it. Thank you for inviting me to come down.”

“It wasn't me,” Muriel said. “It was Mata, after she'd talked to one guy that had a funeral director father and a nurse mother. That's what started the Hospice idea, and twigged me into thinking of getting the word out to others before they needed it.”

“Doesn't matter. You thought of me, and I'm grateful. In fact, I think Sergeant Carter is doing a better job than I was. He knows life and how to laugh. And he has the compassion for the job. All he really needed was the contacts to get others to help. They always seem to come in in bunches, rather than singly,” he said. “He greets death-shocked souls with a smile or a grin – treats them like long lost friends, while he gets friends and relatives to come help them. That smile. That attitude that they're a friend. That's something that I'd never thought to do. Very personal service. In fact, I'm going back to get training from him in that side of it. I might be able to get the word out better using his techniques. Now that's something. We always thought that human souls stagnated when they came to Home. He's shown that they can come up with new ways, too. He's even trained some of the military in Home to do the same thing. Delightful.”

“Well, young lady,” Caleb said, “I should be getting back. And I know that you have things that you want to do. Thank you for the delightful lunch – both the food and the company. I hope you'll let me come again.”

“Of course. Any time. The only time we close this office is if I need all the squads for some reason, like this morning. Oh, I may not always be here, but that doesn't mean that you aren't welcome to come in and talk with anyone in here, or just enjoy the atmosphere.”

“Then, that's what I'll do,” he said, and got up and left. Muriel followed him as far as Mata's desk, then turned off and went to the break-room to find Betty.

“Betty, can I talk to you for a bit?” she asked, when she saw her.

“Oh, sure. What's up?”

“You've been giving my friends college level courses. Sufficient to get a degree in the various disciplines?” Muriel asked.

“Yes, in some cases. Some are still hunting, of course, so they don't have complete degree level, yet. Why?” Betty asked.

“Because I stumbled on one when I finally visited their offices and found that Fran was a full-fledged Doctor by Envoy standards. And I realized that if she was then others might well be. Mark and I handed out certificates to Fran to back up her status. If others have met

degree requirements, then they should also get certificates to back it up.”

“OH! OK, I hadn't thought of that. To Envoys, it's obvious,” Betty said.

“Yep. I agree. And it should be obvious to trained humans, too. But it isn't unless they go looking for it. And to untrained ones it isn't obvious at all. And, outside Enclave, whether one has a degree, or license to practice in a particular field, has legal significance as well as status. So, if you'd tell me what one's have degrees, I'll see that they get their diplomas and licenses as necessary.”

“You can get human degrees and licenses?” Betty asked.

“Nope. But as Chancellor of the University of Home I can confer degrees. And as a leader of home, and therefore the governing body, I can confer licenses, unless there's someone like Mark that I can pass the buck to. I gave Fran her degree, and Mark gave her her license as head of the Board of Medicine of Home.”

Betty started laughing. “Muriel, you're as bad as Ted. You're not doing this for Home, you're doing this for humans, to counter all their ridiculous regulations they have outside Enclave!”

“Yep. But it serves another purpose, too, that you might not realize. The kids, my friends, grew up under all these ridiculous regulations. So, to them, having a certificate saying that they hold a degree of whatever level means something to them. It's an ego booster to them, and a goad to others,” Muriel said. “So, if you've got a moment, why don't we go to my office, and create this pleasant fiction based on fact. Or is it a pleasant fact based on fiction? Either way, let's give the kids the diplomas they deserve and the licenses where necessary,” she added with a grin.

“You are B-A-D!” Betty said, as they went toward Muriel's office.

“Betty, there's an old saying that 'The job isn't finished until the paperwork is done'. I've usually seen it under a picture of a person sitting on a toilet.” Betty stopped, with a stunned look on her face, then busted up laughing. It was just unfortunate that they were just behind Mata's desk when Muriel said it.

“That does it,” Mata said, as she cleaned off her screen. “I'm putting a locator on you so that any time you're within hearing distance of me I'll know not to take a drink.” And glared at Muriel. This only served to cause poor Betty to go into further paroxysm of laughter, and Muriel had to translate her to the casual area and get her seated.

Muriel came back out to Mata's desk, and said, “I'm sorry . . . .”

“Don't,” Mata interrupted.

“Don't what?” asked Muriel



"Don't apologize. Nothing you do with your quips does any real damage. At most it's an inconvenience to clean up. I'm not angry with you," Mata added. "Surprised, yes. But you've got Envoys laughing. And my mock anger just makes it better for them. Look at her. She's having a hard time trying to compose herself. And she's one of the most stable and emotionless Envoys there is. She takes everything in stride. But you just got her laughing, and I added to it. So, don't apologize. I enjoy your humor. I particularly enjoy the effect you have on others. And if I can add to it, so much the better."

"Well, if you're sure . . .," Muriel said.

"Definitely. By the way, Ted's scowl is the same thing. Well, mostly. Once in a while you confuse him. And sometimes it's because he doesn't understand the humor. But even then, the scowl isn't really for you. It's for effect," Mata said.

"Uh, huh. And how much is to bolster the poor little girl's fragile ego, so that she thinks she's better than she really is?"

"Very little, now. Yes, we did try to do things to help you think well of yourself, and gain confidence. But that quickly faded. I think the end of that was when you went and grabbed the President and rubbed his nose in the fact that things were happening, under his nose, by people he'd appointed. At that point we got the idea that you were simply you, and didn't give a hang about what other people thought. Or at least not for the most part," Mata said. "There's been times when you've needed something extra. Caleb's first visit was one of those times. And Ted, your friends and I helped with another. There's also been some times when you've asked if you were out of line. And there'll probably be others. But, since that one episode, and your telling Ted off for trying to molly-coddle you, they've never been hidden things. So, does that help?"

"Yea," she said, thoughtfully. "Yea, I think it does. What you're saying is that you're treating me as a friend."

"A respected friend, but yes. Exactly," Mata said. "You've always treated people as equals and friends, unless they proved to be otherwise. And, even sometimes, when they treated you otherwise you gave them a chance to change into friends. Ted treats people he is close to as friends, but you do it with everyone. So, keep being quirky – keep being outrageous. And don't worry if I sound off like that every once in a while. Take it as a compliment that you got me, once again, and not that I'm mad at you. OK?"

"Alright. As long as you WILL let me know if there's a problem. Please? I can't learn if you don't help me. I need to know when I'm out of line," Muriel said.

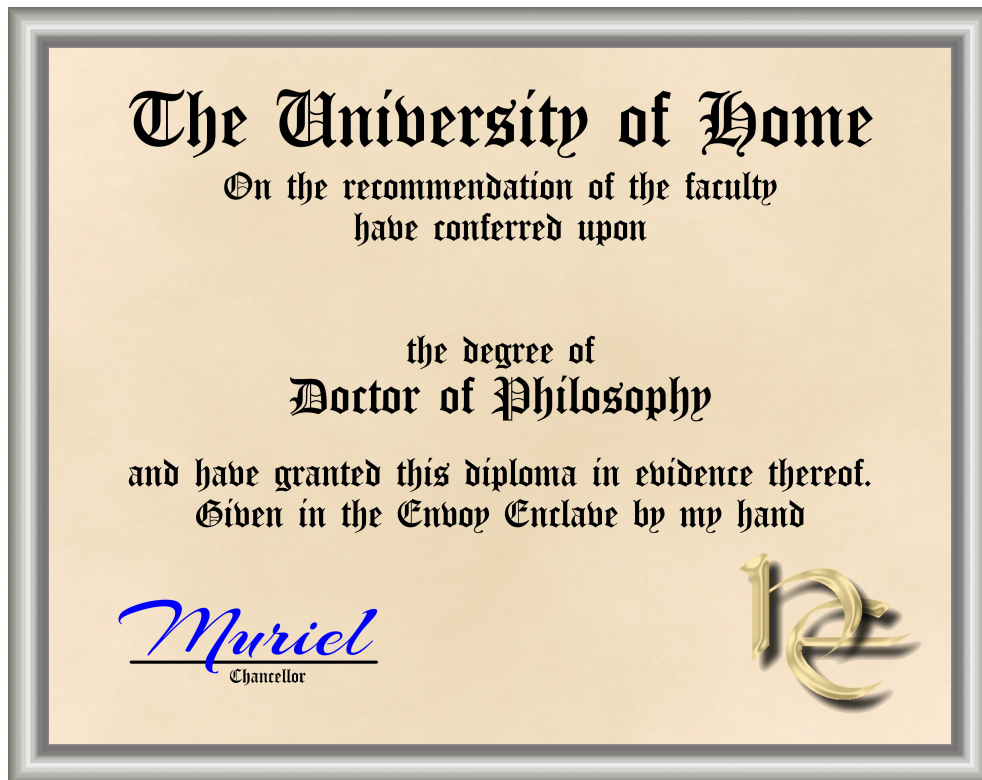
"OK, I can do that," Mata said, and smiled. "Go take care of Betty."

# Chapter 15

## Certificates and Complaints (Friday afternoon)

It took Betty another few minutes to calm down. Muriel gave up trying to talk to her. Every time she did, Betty just started laughing harder. So, finally, she resorted to trying to create a blank diploma that could be used for just about any discipline.

When Betty finally calmed down to the point where Muriel could talk to her, she said, "OK, I've been working on the diploma. See what you think. Is there anything that I should add to it to make it official looking?"



"Oh, my. You've been busy," Betty said. "No, that's about it, unless you want to add the date, or the discipline they got their degree in."

"No date. I don't want to give them room to ask for transcripts or test results or anything. If asked, we can give them the date that you actually gave them the dump. As for the discipline, put it in smaller letters under the Doctor of Philosophy. I want this to be as 'fill in the blanks' as possible. It'll save us both time," Muriel replied.

"Then I'd say you achieved your goal. Simple, official looking, cleaner than a lot that I've seen. So, who are we giving these to?"

"The kids, first. Whatever they've taken. Then that crew from the Army that was taking your courses. I'll need licenses, too, for some of them. Engineering ones I can probably do myself. Anything to do with medicine, though, I'll have to get Mark's help for," Muriel said.

"You called?" Mark was standing in the doorway. "Ooo! Pretty. Can we trade Fran's for one of these?"

"That would be up to her. But I don't think it would be a problem. Mark, would Bobby need a license to be a counselor?"

"Hmm. I believe that outside of Enclave he would. Same if he were seeing any humans inside Enclave, just because they'd look for something like that. Caleb, too," Mark said.

"Caleb?"

"Yep. After talking to Bobby, he came to me for the Psychology course. Betty, are any of the Army guys taking anything medical?"

"Or engineering," added Muriel.

"Um. Let me check my records, and I'll see. But first, let's get the kids covered," she replied.

It didn't take long to pass out the diplomas and licenses. But there were some surprises along the way. Don had three degrees, for example. Two of them were history, which he had hated, and teaching. Tommy, of course, had a degree in philosophy, and was looking at some others. Bobby had psychology, sociology, and psychiatry – which required a medical degree. Needless to say, his wall almost needed a wall extender to support all the paperwork. Carla had degrees in art, fashion design, interior design, and of all things architecture. Jeff almost refused the diplomas. Yes, he had degrees in engineering and computer programming and art. But he said he was still looking. Muriel convinced him that he could look all he liked, and could always change what was on the window. But that the diplomas and licenses served to celebrate a significant point in his life, and he deserved them even if he never used them. The smile he gave her when he finally accepted showed that he just didn't believe in himself as being special or even good. And that this may have been the first time it had ever really been brought home to him.

Other of her friends had degrees, too, even though they were still looking. One, Muriel suggested, should go talk to Ted and his crew. His degrees were in political science, history and sociology. Another had degrees in law and political science, and Muriel suggested he talk to Enclave's law office as well as talk to Ted. But the big surprise was Fran. Come to find out, she'd taken every course that Mark had offered, including psychology, psychiatry, and Medicine, and she finally accepted diplomas and licenses for all of them. But she asked that she be allowed to keep the first certificate as a keepsake. It was the first time that anyone had felt that she'd done something good.

"We've got a problem that I never realized we had, and should have," Muriel said to Betty and Mark. "These kids don't believe in themselves. What can I do to change that?"

"Patience," Mark said. "These kids are young. You got thrown at a goal and it just so happened that your personality and interests were such that you could manage that goal in your own unique way. Most kids don't, and have to find what suits them. Have them look at places that actually use their skills. That's what Fran did. She came to me, and I showed her, physically, what medicine entailed. And she fell in love with it the first time she actually helped someone. Don's considering an ambitious goal of teaching those that can't take the training. Helping them to understand history and the connections to the arts and sciences that took place along the way. And he has the darnedest audio/visual aids to do it with, too. Illusions that appear solid, made of complex shields for terrain, buildings, people and such, and animated. Jeff has been helping him with some of it."

"Right now, they seem to be helping each other," Betty said. "I keep getting requests for ideas of what goes together, and how. Who would have thought that architecture was necessary for interior design. But it is, really. If you don't understand the architecture that your designing into, you can end up creating a garish clash that is unappealing."

"The others are the same way," Betty added. "They aren't looking for something to do. They're looking for connections between things. The inter-operation of things, disciplines, fields of endeavor. Heck, they're doing half my job for me. Ted asked me to look into reclassifying disciplines by what they do. And, in a way, that's what the kids are doing. And no two are looking in the same direction. Hi, Caleb."

"Caleb! We were just coming to see you. We've got your diplomas and licenses to show that you're certified," Muriel said in a rush.

"Well, some would definitely say I'm certifiable," he replied with a grin. "However, you need some for Clyde, too. I can drop them off to him. I am going that way, anyway."

"Well, if you're sure," Muriel said. "Here's yours. That's quite a pile of certificates."

"Well . . . yea. I wanted to be sure I understood what the problems were from a human point of view, and how to avoid stepping on any religious toes," Caleb said, translating his certificates to his desk in his office. "Also, I act as a chaplain to people, sometimes, which is why the professional degrees. Clyde chose to not take the religious aspects of it, which is why I go over there sometimes. He's good with people in the normal course of things. But when it gets into the tangled web of religion, well, he feels that it's not his job to talk about things that don't really exist and never did. I manage to avoid those thorns by mostly just listening."

"OK, well, here are his. And congratulate him for me," Muriel said, handing him another pile. "I'll congratulate him, myself, as soon as I get a chance. But I see someone at my door, so maybe I'd better scoot and see what kind of trouble I'm in this time." She said 'goodbye' and translated to her office. Betty and Mark leisurely walked in to Mata's desk

area, and waited for her to introduce the visitor to Muriel.

“Muriel, Mr. Michael Simmons is here to see you. He's a lawyer representing the Medical profession, and has some complaints against Enclave,” Mata said.

“Mr. Simmons. Please, take a seat. I'm sorry I was out when you came in. I hope you haven't been waiting long,” Muriel said, as she took a seat at her desk.

“No, I only just got here, myself,” he said, sitting across the desk from her. “I'll come right to the point. We're hearing complaints that you and your people are practicing medicine without a license. This stems, originally, from an incident where Enclave people attended an accident on the expressway. Since then, we've discovered that you have a clinic and a hospice, both of which are medical facilities, and that you might have an aid station, too. You'll have to close all these down, and submit the names of anyone engaging in any medical work, past or present.”

“No.”

“What? What do you mean, no?” he asked.

“Just that,” Muriel said. “No. No qualification. No explanation. No equivocation. Just 'no'. Mr. Simmons, I don't believe you fully understand where you are, and who we are. And I'm sure your clients don't. Enclave is an Embassy.”

“Oh, come now. Your office may be considered an Embassy. But not the entire complex,” he replied. “Perhaps I should talk to someone with a bit more . . . um . . . maturity that would understand the seriousness and complexities of the situation.” He started to rise.

“Sit. Mr. Simmons, you are apparently suffering under the misconception that, because I appear to be young, I can't have any idea of the stupidity of your charges – and I'm sure they are charges from the fact that you want names. So, this is a fishing expedition,” she said. “If you have formal charges, then hand them over and we, meaning the Ambassadors and Leaders of Home will answer them through our attorneys. If you don't have formal charges, then I suggest that you settle down and start asking the right questions before you find yourself and your clients facing formal charges of harassment and violation of the treaty we have with this country. Is that understood?”

“Mr. Simmons, I suggest you listen to Ambassador Muriel, the co-leader of Home,” said a voice from the man's right.

“Who the devil are you?”

“Not even close, Mr. Simmons. My name is Ted. I'm an Ambassador and co-leader of Home. And right now you are being back-checked to find out where this particular attack is coming from. Rest assured that, before you leave this office, we'll know. I DO hope that they've had a better reading of the Treaty we have with this country than you display.”

"Oh, now that would be too easy, Ted," Alice said, coming into the area. "Oh, Michael, what have you stepped in this time? They must have put this out to the lowest bidder. You certainly demonstrate the fact that one third of all graduating lawyers graduated in the LOWER third of their class. You really should have read the Treaty before you came. Or, for that matter, before you even accepted the commission. Ted," she went on, "he's not even admitted to the bar. He's just a free-lance corporate lawyer."

"We've got them," Bart said, translating into the room. "Say, it's getting crowded in here. Anyway, it's a three-fold thrust. This is, as you surmised, Muriel, just a feeler. The actual thrust is against our licensing people in their professions, against our conferring degrees, and against our even practicing such professions on our own grounds. In other words, they're trying to break the Treaty."

"Has the President been advised of this move?" asked Ted.

"Yep. He thinks we should bring them in and have a talk with them. And if that doesn't work, then formally charge them in federal court. Oh, and he said to tell you that this action was taken without his knowledge or approval. He also said, 'follow the money', if that means anything to you," Bart said.

"Yep. It means that a lot of people that see the possibility of having to go to work for a living don't like the fact that we can do things faster and better than they can, using techniques that they'll never master," Ted said, "because they can't accept that such techniques are even possible. So, they think to resort to bullying. OK, bring them in. Oh, wait. Alice? Can we use your conference room? I think this would be too large for Muriel's office."

"Of course you can. I'll just make sure that everyone's out. There weren't any scheduled conferences for today, anyway," Alice said.

"Or, we could use the conference table in my apartment," Muriel said. "That way we could offer such refreshment as might be needed."

"I'd rather not," Ted said. "I don't want them too comfortable. OK, Bart. Wait for my signal, then bring them in."

"Very good, sir," he said, switching to Class 'A' uniform. "I'll have one squad assembled in the conference room, and will lead another to assemble the individuals."

"Nice hat, Bart," Muriel said, with a grin.

"Just following the example of the best. This is a time for intimidation, not molly-coddling. So, instead of the utility cap that you normally sport, I chose to use the one that Zeb introduced. I think six Envoys, in uniform, with these hats and grinning like they're hungry, ought to be intimidating enough to put them off their guard," he replied.

"Ted," Muriel said, turning to him, "how do you want to play this?"

“You take the head of the table. I'll take the foot, and we'll whiplash them. Alice, is there a chance that we can have a copy of the Treaty set up behind Muriel, and high enough that they can read it over her head?”

“No problem. And I'm conversant with it, as well as the actions you've taken, here. If you like, I'll represent you as your attorney. If we actually go to war,” Alice said, “I'll have the regular person that represents Enclave as a whole head the team, and I'll just be a part of it to represent Muriel.”

“Sounds good. Then let's get over there, then we can turn loose this hungry security chief that wants so badly to get in on the fun,” Ted said.

# Chapter 16

## Complaints and Counter Complaints (Friday afternoon)

“Gentlemen,” Muriel said, standing at the head of the table, “Sit. You've been called to this meeting because there seems to be some serious misunderstanding of who you are, who we are, and the Treaty between us. Behind me you will see the first two pages of the Treaty. Copies of the entire Treaty are at your places. The first two pages contain the meat of the Treaty. The rest is supplemental, defining terms and outlining property owned by Home and managed by Enclave, with the exception of certain companies recently purchased and operating as American companies under the umbrella of the Envoy Enclave Enterprises holding company.”

“First, I want to draw your attention to the articles of the Treaty that outline Enclave and its leadership. Enclave, as a whole and not just the offices of the Ambassadors, is considered an Embassy. This is because the entire Enclave is in existence to support the Ambassadors in their work. The next section outlines the source of the laws that Enclave operates under, and the section after that specifies who enforces those laws. You will note that the laws are those of Home, as specified by the Leaders of Home. You will also note that the enforcement of those laws is at the pleasure of the Ambassadors.”

“Second, before you even begin to think that you can try to create some confusion between the Leaders of Home and the Ambassadors, let me introduce myself and the man at the other end of the table. My name is Muriel. His is Ted. We are the Ambassadors of Home to the people of America. We also happen to be the Co-Leaders of Home. So, in all instances, you may consider yourselves to be speaking to the Leaders of Home in this matter.”

“Now, let me assure you that there will be no twisting of the decisions made here by your legal representatives. This meeting is being recorded, and by numerous individuals. Those records will demonstrate that, though observed by separate individuals, the content is all the same, thus denying you the opportunity to even suggest that something else was actually said, or that some individual record was edited.”

“In front of you there is also a transcript of the discussion between your attorney and myself, in my office, that precipitated this meeting. In that discussion you will note certain allusions and allegations concerning our rights and privileges. I suggest you look them over, in light of the Treaty, so that you comprehend just how serious those allusions and allegations are, and the nature of the action that we could take against you. And, before you start screaming 'kidnap', be advised that you are not being held against your will. You were called to this emergency meeting to attempt to affect an amicable and reasonable solution without having to take legal action. You are free to leave at any time, either under your own power or with the assistance of one of Ted's security squads. They would return you to your offices. However, before you choose that option, be advised that if you leave this meeting you will no



longer be represented in any form in the discussion, and will have, by your absence, also absented yourself from any involvement or interest in the matter. In other words, you will be forbidden, with prejudice, from ever attempting to take this or similar action against Enclave, Home, or its Leaders. Do you understand?"

"This is outrageous," one of them said. "You have no right . . . ."

"Actually, we do. You are in Enclave, right now. But, beyond that, we have rights as Ambassadors and Heads of State. We have rights. Even under American law, we have rights. And beyond that, any Citizen of Home has rights."

"Your attorney has implied that we have broken some American law here, inside Enclave. That is a very serious charge that could cost each of you, individually, as well as the organizations you represent a great deal of money. Oh, it would also probably end your careers and that of any attorneys that represent you. In addition, he has implied that we have no right to educate people or license them in their chosen professions if they have met our requirements. I'm sure that was a mistake on his part. No intelligent person would attempt to tell the Leader of a foreign nation that he, or she, didn't have the right to certify the education and ability of it's Citizens."

"Bart, as Security Chief to Ted's squads, would you outline what constitutes a Citizen of Home, please?"

"A Citizen of Home is any human that has taken the training necessary to, and accomplished, a trip to Home and back, under his or her own power and while alive."

"Then are you a Citizen?" Muriel asked.

"No, Envoys are people of Home, but not Citizens. Envoys do not have the judgment to be full citizens. And human souls that have come to home upon the death of their earthly body do not arrive under their own power. They are visitors – transients," he replied.

"Then you're telling me that the People of Home have no say in how they're led?"

"Oh, no," Bart replied. "We often are included in discussions, as well as having the right to offer suggestions and ideas. We are very much represented and a voice. Just as the Citizens do. In fact, it was we, the Envoys of Home, that named you and Ted to be Ambassadors and Leaders of Home. Perhaps it would be better to say that we Envoys provide the background service that allows visitors and Citizens to Home to be supported. Human souls, being transient visitors, are a major part of that needed support, though many are now finding ways of being of service themselves. Citizens, on the other hand, are the spark of inspiration that promotes progress in Home."

"OK, now, who were the first Citizens of Home?" she asked.

"Why, Ted and you, Muriel. Part of the reason that you two were made leaders was because of the accomplishment you made in becoming Citizens. But more was the two

different ways that you operate. Ted provides stable change and shapes the direction. You, on the other hand, take more direct action and initiative,” he said.

“Gentlemen,” Muriel said, turning back to them, “Home has existed for longer than you can imagine. Centuries longer than you can imagine. But, until recently, there were no Citizens of Home. Merely Envoys and human transients. On becoming a Citizen of Home and then Leader, Ted discovered that it had stagnated. So he proposed that humans be trained in Envoy techniques – techniques that were far beyond the current abilities of most of the people of Earth, but not beyond the ability of those humans to learn. That was the inspiration for the creation of Enclave, and the reason why the entire Enclave was declared to be an Embassy, despite it’s resemblance to a small city.”

“Then he had the misfortune of having an immature female as his first trainee. Fortunately, that female was headstrong and determined, and right from the beginning changed the way the training was done. Also along the way discovered new ways of doing things, and caused the Envoys protecting her to have to re-evaluate just what the techniques were and what they could do. One of the things they were forced to do was to improve her – my – education. No sense in hiding the fact that I was his first trainee. Because nobody had told me I couldn’t do things, I very often came up with new ways of using the techniques for the betterment of both humans and Envoys. So have other Citizens of Home, now that the numbers are growing.”

“And those new ideas were incorporated. One of them was to answer a need. Methods of passing knowledge to trainees were perfected so that people my age could end up with doctorate level education in a short period of time. Education more complete, and less likely to fade over time than that taught in your schools. We even offered that knowledge to you, in America, and were rebuffed because it didn’t require expensive housing, teachers, books and such that a portion of your society could get fat off of. In short, the college accreditation boards wouldn’t accept us because we didn’t do things their way, thereby giving them more power and money.”

“At the same time, we were developing courses that paralleled many of those disciplines but that used Envoy techniques. Techniques that cannot be taught using your standard methods because they rely on those Envoy techniques that you reject. We saw no possibility that you would ever dream of accrediting them, so we didn’t bother offering them to your general population. And thus was born the University of Home. We’ve already established that the techniques we use to teach are more effective and deliver more knowledge at a time than the methods you use. Therefore, for any course or discipline that simply requires knowledge, such as languages or history or such we feel we have the right to award diplomas indicating the degree. However, for those disciplines that require the Envoy techniques we are the ONLY authority available to award diplomas indicating the degree.”

“Now to more immediate matters. Two of you represent the human medical profession, and have the gall to say that we are not licensed to practice medicine. In fact, what you mean is that we are not licensed to practice human medicine IN THE MANNER BY WHICH YOU PRACTICE IT. Nolo contendere – we do not contest that. And we do not contest that because we do NOT practice medicine in the manner by which you practice it. Nor are you

capable of practicing it the way we do UNLESS you take the Envoy training and request the courses necessary to do so. At which time, you could be awarded a diploma for a degree in medicine by the University of Home, and be certified and licensed to practice by the head of our Medical Board.”

“Gentlemen, it is you that must prove that your ways are better than ours. Our first aid course, given to everyone that takes the basic Envoy training, has already saved lives that might have been lost, as well as returning others with non-life-threatening injuries to full health. Our medical training has already saved the lives of at least two people that your medical profession had given up on. Our methods are not yours. But ours are effective. In fact, they are more effective than yours. And they are available to anyone that is willing and able to take and pass the basic Envoy training.”

“Contest us in court, and we will back up that statement with proof – indisputable proof – in front of witnesses, then sue you out of existence. That's not something we would like to do. We would much rather that you come to us, willingly, and took the training that would elevate your primitive measures to a more effective level. As for you, Mr. Secretary of Education, the only reason you're involved is because the colleges and textbook publishers hollered because our methods of teaching don't involve expensive tuition and housing, meals and books. The education they provide is substandard and outdated. The textbooks used haven't been updated in twenty years, and students are being sent out into the world, after all that expense to either themselves or their parent, ill equipped to do more than ask, 'do you want fries with that'. That you would support such behavior simply indicates either that you have been bought or that you are seriously unqualified for the position that you hold. I'll let you figure out which one for yourself. But I'll tell you this, continue with your attempt to get a foothold on Enclave and it's training and we WILL see you in court, and out of a job, by demonstrating facts.”

“Gentlemen, it's your choice. We offer what we have freely. But we don't bully worth a damn. So, get your head around this fact, now. You have failed in this action. You may choose to feel otherwise, but the outcome would be the same, just more expensive for you. Now, if you have any questions? . . . No? Then Ted's squad will return you to your places. Good day.” And she translated back to her office.

Ted followed immediately. “You're vibrating,” he said.

“Yep. Sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry for,” he replied. “You laid it right on the line, including the history and purpose of Enclave, and the history of our training methods. Also, who was the boss. I don't think I've ever been prouder of you. And I think you'd much rather have a physical fight than this, where you could work off the adrenaline.”

“You've got that right,” she said, with a short laugh, like a bark. “That's why I'm vibrating. But it'll pass. Sorry about leaving so abruptly, though.”

“Again, no reason to be sorry. You'd dismissed the meeting, and had no further reason

to stay. In fact, you reinforced that by leaving, as well as reinforced that it was their decision to make, and you'd have no further comment. Like I said, you did good. And I think that that comment to the Secretary rather nailed the lid on the coffin about accreditation. Basically, you told them that if they want YOUR accreditation, they'll have to meet YOUR standards, which means that they'll have to take your training. Well done, indeed. I think we've just seen the end of the accreditation war."

"Ted," Bart said, entering without the hat, "I brought the Secretary of Education back. His request. Oh, and he said to tell you that he's not here to browbeat you into submission. He'd like to see you."

"Me?" asked Ted, "or both of us."

"Well, actually, Muriel, if she's up to it," Bart replied.

"Of course," said Muriel. "Bring him in." And he came, obviously in pain. **FRAN!**

And she was there, with two of her squad. Muriel, who had left her recliner to greet him, immediately flattened it, like an exam table or gurney. Her side table found itself behind her desk, and the Secretary was placed on her recliner, and they went to work.

Almost unnoticed, Mark stood beside Muriel and relayed what was going on. ::Fran's got his heart, and is repairing it. He's unconscious, which is why he's not feeling the pain. The Envoy on this side is oxygenating his blood and keeping his brain and body alive. The heart is stopped, apparently since he walked in the door. The other is going after blockages in the arteries. Oh! And he's removing stents and strengthening the arterial walls, too. Now, the second is going over his entire body, strengthening and supporting it. The first is keeping the blood circulating and pulsing in a natural sinus rhythm. THERE! She's repaired the damage. She should bring him back to consciousness, soon. OH! Good thinking, she's checking for pain stimulus so that he won't experience it when he's brought back to consciousness. Very good! Now. Here it goes::

"Come on. Come on, Mr. Secretary. Come on back. You're all right now," Fran muttered, almost like a chant. And slowly, color returned to his face, breathing steadied, and his eyes opened. "Just stay still, sir. You're all right now. Just lie quiet for a few minutes."

"Oh . . .," he murmured, "are you an angel?"

"No, sir. Just a human girl. Just your doctor," she replied, with some amusement.

"Are you sure? My doctor said that the next one I got would be my last." His words came slowly, with gaps for breath, but were firmer than before. "It's why the President gave me this job, you know. So that when I died my wife would get my pension. And this was the next one. So you must be an angel."

"No, sir. Just your doctor, here in Enclave," said Fran. "Just a friend. You won't have any more heart attacks like that, sir. Though your doctor may when he finds out that you no

longer have a heart condition. Feeling better, now?"

"Yes, I think so," he said. Fran slowly changed the recliner's configuration to a more seated one, slowly, watching his reactions and for any signs of low blood pressure. A bit of power trickled to him helped him firm up and better come into focus. "Enclave. I remember. I asked the guard to bring me back so I could talk to Muriel. Then, I felt a pain, and I couldn't catch my breath. It seemed like someone shouted a name in my head. Fran? Was that it?"

"Yes, sir. That's my name. I came, and brought two more to assist. Two Envoys from my squad," Fran said.

"This isn't a hospital. I'm still wearing all my clothes. How . . . ?"

"That's not the way we work, sir. Envoy techniques. We work directly on the cellular level, restoring damaged tissue, things like that," she said.

"How long?" he sighed.

"About five minutes. The damage to your arteries was more extensive than we first thought, so it took us longer to correct it, and get your heart repaired."

"Five minutes . . . . It would have taken hours in a hospital, and you do it in five minutes." He looked around. "Where am I?"

"This is Muriel's office. We didn't take the time to move you. We felt that it was more important to just get to work," Fran replied. She trickled a little more power to him, and watched him straighten up more. The chair responded to his action and assisted him to the position he felt comfortable with.

"Fran, my squads will get you and him anything you need," Muriel said.

"Thanks, Muriel, but we've got it covered," one of Fran's squad said. "Chuck is coming up with it now. See if you can get her to sit down," he said, indicating Fran. "She's reacting." Mark quickly went to her and guided her to the couch.

"Just relax, now," Mark said. "Your people can handle it. You did fine. Better than I could have done. Your first big emergency, and you made it work like clockwork," he told her. "I couldn't be prouder of you."

"You were here." She made the question sound like a statement.

"I was here and monitored. You didn't need my help. You and your people worked flawlessly. All I could do was the play by play, so that the others would know what was going on. You did better than just OK. It won't be his heart that sends him to Home," Mark said, firmly. "So, just relax and let the adrenaline wash out of your system, now."

"Mark," Muriel asked, "Clinic or Guest House?"

“Guest House, I think, though we’ll leave the final answer to the attending physician. He needs rest and care, but I don’t think he needs the antiseptic atmosphere and continuous attention that he’d get in the Clinic.”

“I’ve got the Guest House,” Ted said.

“OK,” Muriel replied. “Then I’ll alert the President that he’ll have to do without him for a few days.”

# Chapter 17

## Recovery and Restitution

(Friday, late afternoon)

::Mr. President. You'll have to do without the Secretary of Education for a few days. He had a heart attack . . . .”

::Oh, dear. Well, it wasn't unexpected. I'll have to inform his wife, and is there a chance that you can send his body back?::

::Sir, he's not dead. Fran and two of her squad got to him and fixed his heart and arteries, then went over his body and strengthened and corrected things. But it's been a shock to his system, and he needs a few days to recuperate::

::He's alive?::

::Yes, sir. And gaining strength. He should be fine in two or three days. I'll let you know if it takes longer::

::Muriel, I know why he went out there. And I know that the medical profession was out to close you down. You mean to tell me that you pulled him through with Envoy techniques when his own doctor had given up on him? And who's Fran?::

::Fran is one of my friends. And yes, she's a full Doctor. All my friends have their own offices, now, and many of them have already selected careers, and have diplomas and licenses as necessary to prove it::

::Muriel, I know about when he was taken out of Washington. How long did the operation last?::

::Sir, it wasn't an operation like you would think of. She did the whole thing here, in my office, in the casual area. It took about five minutes until his heart started beating again and he regained consciousness. She finished just a few minutes ago::

::Five minutes. And by one of your friends. Oh, I remember her. She's the one that was on TV. Her father had thrown her out, or something. Wait a minute, you mean a twelve year old saved his life?::

::Yes, sir. And Mark's all over her about how well she did::

::He should be. OK, this is going out to the media, immediately. You've just proven that your training techniques are effective in imparting knowledge and experience, and more than effective in getting a job done. Now maybe the schools and such will stop hollering at me to force you to use their methods of teaching. I'll put it right in the speech that from now

on the measure of a school's accreditation or of licensing is what can be done with Envoy training.::

::Just don't make it too strong, sir. We don't want to cause this to escalate in any way. We just want to shut the money machine down, and give people a REAL alternative to the way things are.::

::OK, Muriel. I'll think about it. Certainly, the fact that a twelve year old girl saved his life and repaired his heart should make a statement of its own.::

::Thank you, sir,:: she replied. ::I'll wait to see what you say on Television.:: Ted looked up at her, questioningly.

"He wanted to come down hard on accreditation, and tell people that now the standard had just been set higher. That what we did was the new standard. I think that would be wrong, at this time," Muriel said, then went over to her friend and sat down beside her.

"Hey, kid. You did good. Take three slow, deep breaths and let them out, before you worry people." Fran did as Muriel suggested, then, on the last breath, started chuckling.

"Hey, boss. I'm supposed to be the doctor."

"You are. You certainly are that," Muriel said. "Mark relayed what you three were doing, and it all went rapid fire. I'm surprised that he could keep up with you. And you know what a fast talker he is." Fran grinned.

"Oh, hey, I've still got work to do. Mark, I'm asking your opinion. Clinic or Guest House. And should we bring his wife in."

"I'd say Guest House. There's staff there that can help, or can call you if there's a problem. But from what I saw you do, and a scan of him while you were falling apart, I'd say he's in better shape than he's been in ten years. Maybe more."

"Falling apart, huh? And you didn't on your first emergency like that?" Fran asked.

"I don't remember. It was that long ago."

"Yea, right. Well, it was the shock of realizing what I'd just done. And how wrong it could have been. Now, though, I think I can trust the training to kick in. Guys," she said, looking at her squad members, "thanks for the help. You two made this possible. And Muriel, NOW I feel that I earned those little pieces of paper you tossed at me. I'm still keeping the original as a keepsake, though. Mark, you never said whether to have his wife brought in."

"It couldn't hurt. But I think it should be their decision," he said.

"Good." Fran got up and went over to her patient. "Sorry for the childish display, sir. I promise it won't happen again. At least, not with you. Your arteries are clear, lungs and brain



in good shape, heart is completely healed and working better than it probably has in a long time. I'd send you home, except that I think you need a little recovery time to ease back into life. Now, the question comes down to 'would you like to have your wife with you for the next couple of days?' I think that's all you'll need, though you can take longer if you like."

"I'd like it. I'll have to ask her, though. And we have pets that have to be taken care of," he said.

"Sir, we can have a couple of Envoys house-sit for you and take care of them. Pets recognize Envoys, so I've been told," Muriel said. "One of them can get directions from her as to what needs to be done, and the other can bring her back here, then return to watch the house for you. You can tell her that when you call. Need a phone?"

"No, I've got one," he said, and made the call. Moments later, his wife was in his arms.

"Oh, Paul! I thought I'd lost you."

"No such luck, babe. I'll be around for a while, now. My doctor not only repaired my heart, but a lot of other things, too. So this won't happen again," he said.

"Your doctor. I must thank him."

"Her. She's a she. And she'd the one, right over there, in the white uniform," he replied.

"Her? But she's just a little girl," his wife said.

"Nonetheless, dear, she's a doctor, and she saved my life."

Fran began shrinking into herself. Muriel nudged her, and held her chin up, and smiled. Fran looked at her for a second, then turned to the Secretary's wife.

"Ma'am, my name is Fran. I'm human and twelve years old. I'm also a Doctor of Medicine, along with a few other things. I've also received Envoy training," she said, causing her stripes to glow, some, on her shoulders, "and gotten the training in how Envoys heal from the head of the Medical Board for Home. The training and techniques we use are not like human doctors use. No long hours of cutting, no long days or months of recuperation. Now, he could probably go home tonight, but I'd much prefer that he stay for a couple of days and work back into being active slowly. Not because I don't trust my work, but because it would be easier on his system right now. He's had a shock and needs the time to re-find himself. Shortly, we'll be taking you, and him, to Guest House. A room has already been reserved for you, and the Envoys there are just waiting for you to arrive. There's no charge for the room or the service, or for anything you may need while you're here."

"What about the cost of the . . . whatever you call it? It wasn't really an operation," Paul asked.

"As soon as the heart attack struck, you became a guest of Enclave. We don't charge guests," Muriel said. "That includes the procedure and whatever recovery time your doctor feels you need. It also includes the Envoys that are house-sitting for you. All you have to do is get better."

"You're that girl – the one on television that kept doing impossible things, aren't you?" the Secretary's wife asked.

"Yes ma'am. My name is Muriel, and I'm an Ambassador and co-leader of Home. Welcome to Enclave. I could wish it were under better circumstances, but you are here, and we will try to make your stay as pleasant as possible."

"Why? I mean, I know why my husband was coming out here, though he made it a bit before he expected to. It was his intention to shut down your University and medical facilities. Yet you saved his life, and proved that your University turns out top-notch students. So, why are you helping him?"

"It's what we do, ma'am. We're protectors. With the Envoys, it's built into them. With humans, it seems to go hand in hand with their ability to take the training. At least, I've never met someone who took the training that wasn't a protector in one way or another. It may be built into humans, too," Muriel said. "How about we get you over to your rooms, and let you settle in for the evening. Tomorrow, you can move around and see the sights. The Envoys at Guest House would be happy to show you around, help you get clothing that you weren't expecting to need. Even today, they can have tailors in to fit you in no time, and it would be their pleasure to do so. For food, the Guest House has a great cook, or you can order from any of the restaurants in Enclave and have it delivered."

Fran had already moved to the Secretary's side and was checking him over. "Heart – good strong rhythm, blood pressure – good throughout, brain – no weaknesses or stress, pain – hmm what's that? Oh. Guys, he's sitting on his keys. I know we were rushed, but now we have a bruise to take care of. How about it, sir, feel strong enough to stand up?"

"Yes, I think so," the Secretary said, and slowly, testing as he went, got to his feet.

"Addictive, isn't it," Mark said.

"Yes and no," Fran said. "I just feel that I have to leave them in the best shape possible before I turn them loose." Then she looked at Mark and smiled. "Yea, it's hard letting go. OK, guys, the minor bruise is taken care of. Why don't you two take the Secretary and his wife over to Guest House. Mr. Secretary, I'd like to see you in the morning, just as a double check that we took care of everything and everything is working the way it's suppose to. I promise, it won't be like an exam in a human doctor's office. Your wife can even chaperon you to be sure that I behave myself," she said, with a grin. "Go, get settled in and enjoy your stay."

When they'd left, she turned to Mark. "What did I do wrong?"

"Not a thing," Mark said with a smile. "Did I come to help? Yes. If you needed it. You didn't."

"I felt you in the group mind."

"Yes, you did. I let the others know what you were doing. You know, from outside, it looks like three people standing around somebody on a table. And they were worried. Especially Muriel. So I told them what you three were doing. Right up to the time when you brought him back to consciousness. That was a nice touch, checking to be sure there wasn't any further pain stimulus hanging around."

"Straight?" Fran asked.

"I can't lie," Mark replied. "I came to back you up, and you already had two of your people around you, and had divided up the work in such a way that there was nothing left for me to do but stand here and look beautiful." That got a smile, then a chuckle out of Fran. "Do you know how hard it is for me to look beautiful?" And that got a laugh.

"Mark, I hate to break it to you, but you're about the homeliest Envoy I've ever seen," Fran said.

"Then you DO understand how hard it is for me." And that drew more laughter. "So I had to do something to distract the crowd. So I told them what you were doing. Seriously, you not only fixed the heart, you fixed what caused the attack, then went over the whole body making sure that everything was up to strength – that there wouldn't be any blowouts when full pressure was reapplied. You even picked up on the fact that he was sitting on his keys, and fixed the bruise. You did good, Fran. Even falling apart afterward. That was intense – I know, I've been through some tough ones – and the only suggestion I can make is to give yourself an extra shot of power before you fully pull away. It won't stop the shakes and whatever, but it will reduce the effect."

"Thanks, Mark. And thanks for coming and monitoring what I was doing, even if I didn't need help. And for letting the others know what I was doing," Fran said. "That was nice of you."

"No problem," he replied. "I was happy to be here just to watch you in action, Impressive. You were each monitoring what was going on, and adjusting to each other while maintaining what you needed to do."

And, in Guest House, things were rather rocky. No sooner had Fran's squad members shown up with the new guests than two people arrived to measure them for new clothes, and get ideas of style from them. Along with that, two more Envoys showed up from the management to help them get settled. It wouldn't have been so bad, except that the Envoys from the clothing store and the Envoys from Management were very similar, and both pairs were male and female. Finally, it was sorted out by having the ones from the store measure for clothing, first, and get an idea of what the two humans would like to wear. When that was done, the two from management took orders for a light snack to tide them over to dinner

time, and left.

It took a little time for the Secretary and his wife to choose appropriate clothing for the next day, as well as sleepwear. Books were produced that had styles for men and women, and each poured over them with the store Envoys. Suits had changed little over the years, though there were some minor variations as well as differences in fabric and color. Women's clothing, though was much more complex. It was suggested that they select something basic for the morning, and could choose other styles for subsequent days when they had more time. And, to help them, they left style books with the two.

The two Envoys from management didn't return until the others had left. As the male passed Paul's chair, he said, quietly, "Turn the page."

"What?"

"Unless you know how to wear kilts, and are comfortable with really standing out in a crowd, I wouldn't recommend it. However, the next page also has something in tartan. Turn the page," the Envoy said. Paul did, and there was the same outfit in trews rather than kilts.

"Dreaming again, Paul," his wife said. "Maybe we can afford to do both. We can ask. And you'd definitely stand out next week."

"Maybe I can help," a young voice said. "My name is Tommy, and I'm an Ambassador. My specialty is philosophy. But when we were deciding on uniforms for a formal affair I tried both of these. If you can imagine me as older and bigger, or I can remember how to grow, I can show you what they'd look like in your tartan. What one is it?"

"MacLaren," Paul said. "Clan MacLaren. Do you know it?"

"No. But I can find out," he said moving toward the computer. "Just a second. Ah! Nice. OK, this is going to take a couple of seconds. I'll have to go to the uniform, first, then grow, then add the tartan." And he did. Paul's eyes bugged out when he changed into the formal kilt uniform, and again when he grew and matured to about twenty five. Then, suddenly, the kilts and fly plaid were in the MacLaren tartan. "Now, depending on how formal the occasion is, the fancy stuff at my throat could be white, like this," he said, changing the off white to flat white. "Or tartan, like this," he said, and the triangle changed to tartan.

"Wow," said Paul's wife. "How do you do that?"

"Oh, it's just an application of the training I have. Of course, for me it's easy. I don't actually have to put all this stuff on. I just have to remember what it looks like, and change," Tommy said.

"What are the things on your shoulders?" Paul asked.

"Oh, oops. Sorry. Those are my stripes – the acknowledgment of the fact that I took and passed the basic training. Everyone that completes the training has a set like this,

though the braid in the middle is different depending on personal choice,” Tommy replied. “But I’m holding you up from your snack,” he added.

“And how do I get the training?” Paul asked.

“Well, first you have to pass a test to see if you can even be trained. Oh, it isn’t something you study for. Just whether or not you can make a mental link – because everything is either done or monitored through that link. Here, let me show you what it looks like in trews,” Tommy said, trying to change the subject.

As he changed, Paul asked, “Can you train me?”

“Tommy? What are you doing?” Fran asked, popping in.

“Just showing the Secretary what his kilts or trews would look like in his tartan,” Tommy said, defensively. “Honest!”

“And because of that, now he wants to take the training?”

“Well, I accidentally left my stripes on when I made the change, and he asked what they were. Honest!”

“Tommy, he just had a major procedure. He doesn’t need the strain.” Fran was tapping her foot, now.

“Oh, I agree with you, Fran. And I didn’t say I’d train him. Honest!”

“Tommy, you’re a philosopher. There’s nothing honest about you. Honest.”

“Um . . . could I learn, too?” Paul’s wife asked.

Fran just glared at Tommy for a very long minute. Then threw up her hands, turned to Paul and his wife and said, “Sit. Eat. The first thing we have to find out is if you can even make the link. Don’t get your hopes up. I’m not a trainer, and neither is Tommy. I’m calling in a couple of my squad to help us over the rough spots. IF you can be trained. And I hope the President is very understanding, because I won’t take this at a fast pace. Not just after that procedure. Is that understood?”

“Yes, ma’am,” Paul said. “Are you SURE you’re not an angel? You’re glowing. Even your eyes.”

“I am NOT an angel. I’m just a very angry and upset girl that may skin her co-Ambassador sometime in the next five minutes,” Fran said. “This is NOT the type of strain you need at this time.” She took a deep breath, and let it out, then said, “I’m not angry at you, sir. Honest. But to get you to the point where you can make your own clothes can be a strain. And the last stripe definitely is. That’s taking the trip to Home and back under your own power. It’s not hard. But the first time is definitely a strain.”

"Yes, ma'am. Whatever you say. If you say 'come back in a week – or a year – or whatever, I'll abide by it," Paul said. "But I still think you're an angel."

"No, sir," said a white-clad girl with the rod of Asclepius on her shoulders, behind Fran. "We are," and she grew and changed. And so did her male partner. And then they grew wings. After a moment, they resumed their child-like form and she added, "We're Envoys, now. Both words mean the same thing, which is why Ted chose it. Anyone with a plain uniform is an Envoy. The kids are just that, kids. Friends of Muriel, who is also a kid. We Envoys just try to stay as far away from anything remotely religious as possible."

The mouths of both Paul and his wife dropped open. Fran rushed to Paul, then looked at his wife. "I've got her," Mark said. "And you, two. You're suspended. I'll speak with you later." Both Paul and his wife were seated in recliners by this point.

::His eyes,:: Tommy sent to Fran. ::I've never seen eyes glow black, before::

::Angelic anger, Tommy. And I hope he never aims that at me::

"Mark. You do NOT suspend my people. I'll speak to you later about this. Then I'll talk to them." She spoke quietly, but Tommy noticed that her eyes blazed just as black, and with a red core. And Mark looked shocked. "You, two. I want you to go back to the office and stay there until I've had a chance to talk to Mark, and then to you. I'll try not to be long."

"Fran . . . ." His eyes went back to normal.

"Later, Mark. In my office. Right now, we have patients to deal with. As for you, Tommy Smith, I'll see you here tomorrow morning at eight o'clock to start their training, if they can do it. Until then, and until I can calm down and talk rationally, it would be better if you left. No, I'm not mad at you. Really. Just . . . go." And Tommy got.

# Chapter 18

## Caterpillar to Butterfly (Friday evening)

“Doctor Fran,” one of the Guest House Envoys said, “we’d be happy to monitor the Secretary and his wife tonight.”

Fran looked around at them. “I know you. You were part of the many Envoys I interviewed for positions on my squad.”

“Yes, ma’am. We’ve had the training, so we know what to watch for and what to do in an emergency – along with calling for you, of course. We weren’t comfortable with full doctoring, but would have made effective nurses. But you needed doctors to back you up. It’s just as well. We have more fun working in service with more direct contact with people. And we get our share of nursing, too, dealing with upset stomachs of children and various childhood diseases.”

“I’ll take you up on your offer, then. At least, just as soon as they’ve calmed down,” Fran said.

“If I may, ma’am, perhaps service oriented people would be better for that. We could even see if they could make the mental link, if you like. It would prove to be a distraction. Also, if you don’t mind my saying so, I think instead of a snack now, we’ll suggest an early supper and an early night. I believe that their minds just need time to get used to all that’s happened.”

“You’re being awfully deferential,” Fran said. “And I’m not ‘ma’am’. I’m just Fran.”

“The way he talks is a device, Fran,” Mark said. “One that the servants of the very rich use in order to direct their charges in a particular path.”

Fran thought about that for a bit, then turned back to the two Envoys. “So, what you’re telling me is to get out of here and let you do your job.” Then she smiled, tiredly. “Maybe you’re right. And you do know how to get ahold of me. I’m afraid that it’s going to be more like working with geriatrics, though, for a bit.”

“Oh, I’m sure we can jolly them along, and help them come to grips with enough of what’s happened to begin functioning again,” The Envoy said.

“Mark, let’s go,” Fran said, then didn’t give him the option of choosing. They translated to her office, and she immediately put up solid shields that stopped vision and sound leaving the area.

“Sit down, Mark. We need to talk.” She seated herself in her recliner, which Mark

considered a GOOD sign. It meant that he'd be left with a little skin. Figuratively speaking of course, since Envoys didn't have skin as such.

"Mark, I think you already know that I respect you on a number of levels." Oh, oh, he thought, it's going to be worse than I thought. "But what you did, in that room, was inexcusable. Those two were my staff. Yes, you trained them. You trained a hundred Envoys and sent them to me to interview. They are good doctors, and mesh well with me, which is why I was able to affect a cure in such a short time. And now I've got to try to regain that connection with them, or fire them and find two new ones to get used to."

"We'd already supplanted them by taking over the situation, ourselves. That left them standing there looking dumb and wondering where they'd messed up. And I was about to ask you for the loan of a couple of your nurses, since you usually aren't busy at night. But then you compounded the error by turning on the Angelic Anger, and making like a boss. And after all the stress I'd gone through I suddenly realized why Ted and Muriel are the leaders they are. And why Muriel is sometimes so outrageous."

"Rage. Rage, Mark. I turned it on you, and now I've got to try to, somehow, find a way to at least regain your friendship. And Tommy saw it, so now I've got to try to talk him down, and get him to understand that I wasn't mad at him. And I've got two doctors that I've got to try to regain contact with. And believe me, they're shut down, right now. Not even communicating with each other. Rage is where a human goes when anger is just not enough. Rage is what can cause a human to perform superhuman tasks. Rage is what can turn a mouse of a soldier into a hero. Without realizing it, that was what I used to beat the clock in working on the Secretary. And it takes a lot out of a human, even one that's tapped into power. Because it isn't a power thing, it's an adrenaline thing – purely glandular – and it takes time for that adrenaline to wash out of one's system."

"So, how do we turn this around, Mark. We can't turn it back. I've changed. Boy, have I changed. I can even face my father and mother, now. So, the entire structure is different, but we still have to be able to interact. Enclave is too small for us to be antagonistic toward each other."

"You're right. I was wrong. I was way out of line, and you were right to put me down hard," he said.

"So, is there a way that we can at least be friends?" Fran asked.

"I don't know. Oh, I'll try. Fran, you've changed. You've grown up. And you're much more like Muriel than you may know."

"Oh, but I do know. After all, she was my protector for years, and I envied her how she could deal with things. And come to find out, the reason she could was because so much of the time she was operating in one form or another of rage. And you're dodging."

"Can I ask one other thing? When you called me out, what was your vision like?" Mark asked.



"The same as the rest of the time. Why?"

"Because, I know what you mean by Angelic Anger. Our eyes glow black. Well, at least at one level they do. But there's a level beyond that, a red glow in the center that seems to be on the surface and yet very far away at the same time. When an Envoy gets to that stage, somebody dies. I saw that in your eyes. And I fully expected to be dead beyond recovery. Ted and Muriel may have something when they think that humans are simply Envoys in physical bodies. In all the time that Muriel's been around here I've never seen her or heard of her reaching that state. And I've NEVER heard of anyone being able to pull back from it."

"Most people wouldn't be able to. Rage is a tool. But, like any tool it requires something to guide it. Some people realize this, and instead of rage ruling them, they rule it. They think, and the thinking rules whether they turn the rage loose, and to what degree. Muriel is like that and has been for quite a while, now. When my father threw me out first I was depressed, then I was suicidal. Then . . . then I was angry, and the rage built. But I used it, rather than it using me. It's been building in me, since then. So, when the Secretary had his heart attack, I used it. A sense of 'you WILL not beat me' that kept me driving forward – kept my doctors driving forward – working faster AND better to get the job done."

"And then you made a mistake, at just the wrong time and in just the wrong way. A little earlier and I probably would have reacted like I used to and wimped down. But today was just not a 'wimp down' type of day, and you got caught in the backlash. I'm sorry about that. But not much. The dynamics have changed, Mark. I won't be 'put in my place' any more. The only one that can put me in my place, now, is me. Just like Muriel. I won't swat flies with atomic bombs. But I WILL make sure that someone trying to bully me in the future realizes that he or she just made the worst mistake of their lives."

"So, that's why I'm looking for a compromise, here – a way we can remain friends. Because if we can't, then this will just escalate, and one of us would have to go. So, this is it. Can you accept that I may be a kid, but I'm no longer a child? Can you be a friend to someone that's going through some rough changes in personality and may act out on occasion?"

"Yea," Mark said. "Yea, I can try. We may still have some rough times, but I don't think they'll be anything like that. I may offer advice from time to time . . . ."

"Oh, I'd expect that. I'm not saying that I know everything or always have the best ideas," Fran interrupted. "Just – overriding me as if I weren't even there would not be a good idea. I can't be treated as a child any more."

"Yea, I got that. Do you want me to stay away from the Secretary?"

"Oh, heck no. By all means, come. And if you see something that I slipped up on, tell me," Fran said. "Oh, by the way, we've got a crowd out there, including both Ted and Muriel, and I think about half the population of Enclave. YOU deal with them. I've got to try to jolly

down my staff.” And she grinned. And Mark laughed, just as the shields went down and Fran went through the crowd at the entrance to her area like they weren't there. Cheerfully.

She blew past her Security Chief without a word, and headed for her two doctors in the break room. Behind her, just audible, was the murmured, “Oh, oh. She grew up.” And Mark's much more audible, “OK, you lot, outside and let's stop using up all the air in here,” followed by a chorus of, “Are you all right? What happened? She's not leaving, is she?” and Tommy's rejoinder, “Don't be absurd. She's handling it just like Muriel would. Scary, isn't it. Now there's two of them,” and laughter.

Fran didn't wait around to see how Mark would deal with the crowd. She made a bee-line for the break-room and put up another shield barrier. The ironic smile on Fran's face did nothing at all to reassure the two Envoys sitting there on the edge of their chairs. In fact, if anything, it only made things appear to be worse. And, with the speed that the barrier went up behind her, they expected that their life expectancy was now nil. Had they been human a serious cleanup would have been necessary.

“Guys, we've got a problem. And I intend to see it solved,” Fran said to the terrified Envoys. “You are good security people. You are even better doctors and mesh well with me. But your bedside manner sucks. One simply doesn't give a patient who is already trying to recover from a massive shock ANOTHER massive shock. On top of that, playing the 'A' card and getting feathers all over the room just isn't done except in extreme situations. Showing people the difference between humans and Envoys is not an extreme situation.”

She turned one of the recliner-lounge chairs around to face them and sat down. “You have to think of the consequences of your actions. In security, in doctoring, and in dealing with people, it isn't just what you do but what the unintended outcomes MIGHT be. Fortunately, Mark and I were there to try to mitigate some of the disaster. In addition, the two Envoys from Guest House have the same training you do. As a matter of fact, they were on the interview list ahead of you, and requested being taken off of it for personal reasons which I respect and admire. Reasons that make them ideal to monitor the Secretary and his wife, tonight, and to try to reduce the shock. In short, they're doing your job.”

“So,” she said, “that brings me to now. What am I going to do with you? I can't keep you on staff if you're continually going to go around pulling bone-headed gaffs like this. But, by the same token it's hard to find people that can mesh as well as you do in a crunch. Technically, I could do it. You're still on probation, here. If you don't work out, I could just send you back and bring in the next pair. But who knows how they'll work out. When I assembled this squad I did the best I could to pick what I thought were the best. That, by definition, makes anyone else second best or worse.”

“In security,” she said, leaning back in the chair, “your reaction times are good. But reaction times require no thought – hence the term 'reaction time'. In doctoring, your procedures and the ability to mesh and see what's going on around you that affects your work and vice-versa are good. But again, those are trained reflexes – reactions, if you will. None of that requires any real thought. However, interpersonal relations DOES require thought. There is no training that I know of, other than by experience, that can tell you what you need

to do in a given set of circumstances, because the possibilities are endless. You HAVE to be able to think and reason. You have to be able to see what a potential outcome might be before you say or do something that might adversely affect the situation. Especially with a patient or a patient's relatives."

"Kidding around between us is one thing. Here, if you say the wrong thing it can be excused because we know you." She leaned forward and placed her hands on her knees. "But we deal with more than just us. We deal with people we don't know, and, to top it off, people who are in an extremely agitated state to begin with due to illness or injury. Did you ever follow Mark around after you got his training?" she asked, switching gears. "How did he deal with patients and relatives?"

"Well . . . , " one of them said, "he talks a lot, jokes around, stuff like that."

"And what does he actually say?"

"Um . . . nothing, really. It's just a flow of words. Some of it making fun of himself, but not of his ability to be a doctor," he added the last quickly. "Basically, what he has to say is meaningless sound until he finally tells them that they're all right now."

"Exactly. He keeps the patient and family concentrating on him and not on the injury or disease. He banters, kids, keeps up a meaningless chatter to distract them. That's his way. There are others. Maybe you've seen some," she said, fishing for an answer from them.

"Well, there's you," the other one said. "You talk to the person, asking about who they are and what they do – likes and dislikes . . . oh. Same thing. You're distracting them from the disease or injury while you work. You even kid about you being so young but being a doctor. Or how you accidentally got roped into being trained. Or what it's like to have your own security squad and office. It's all just banter?"

"Yes and no. Oh, gad! If Muriel heard that she'd hit me. She HATES that term. Even though she uses it herself, sometimes. Yes, it's banter. But no, it doesn't mean that I don't care about the person and what they're saying about themselves. What people say, and how they say it, says a lot more than just the words. It tells you their feelings about their life. It tells you about what they think of themselves. It can even tell you what others think of them. Mostly by non-verbal ways mixed with what they say. So, the banter. Mark has his way, I have mine. I expect you to come up with your own. Things you can say, reflexively that won't prompt the wrong type of reaction. But, until you have, I've got to keep you away from situations where there might be another serious mistake." She broke off, there and looked unfocused.

"I just got an update from the Secretary's room. The Envoys there got the Secretary and his wife to sit at the table, have a few mouthfuls of fruit and some crackers, got them involved in normal activities. Oh, good! They responded well and quickly, and have started talking with them, so they've broken out of the shock. All systems appear to be working normally. Oh, and they played 'knock-knock' with them. They can both link. And they've warned them against trying to link to each other too much, as it takes a great deal of strength

to keep it up. But now they know they can be trained. Well Done!" The last sent mentally as well as said.

"What's going to happen to us?" one of her pair asked.

"What do you want to happen? Do you want to go back to Home? Do you want to stay and try to improve? What?"

"You mean we have a choice?"

"Of course you do," Fran said. "I wouldn't have spent this much time talking to you if I felt you were irredeemable. You'd simply be gone. Back to Home. If you want to stay, though, you'll have to find a way to curb thoughtless actions. Talk to Diane. Talk to Mata or Bart, or any of their squads. Heck, talk to the other kids, if you want to. Find out how they do things. See what fits. Even talk to Mark. He won't bite."

Fran got up, dropped the shield barrier, and walked out of her office, leaving two bewildered Envoys behind her, wondering why they were still alive. Tommy was waiting for her. She walked up to him and hugged him.

"Whoa! What was that all about?" he asked.

"Just thanks for realizing that I wasn't mad at you for what happened in the Secretary's room. And thanks for turning the crowd so well. That comment about me being like Muriel now. That got them laughing and moved away from thinking anything serious about what had happened."

"Well! Mark's still alive. Your troops are still alive. I'M still alive. And you're not huddled in a corner somewhere. Something amazing has happened here!"

"Yep," Fran said. "I grew up."

"Oh, gad! Does that mean that I have to, too, now?"

"Too late. I think it already happened. Doubting Thomas the philosopher, indeed. I want to know the rest of the courses you took. I think you've been holding out on us. I think you took some psychology and sociology, too," Fran said.

"Religions, too," he said, seriously. "Most of them, and philosophy, are seriously deluded. All of them are just plain wrong, because they start with the wrong premise. Oh, there's bits and pieces along the way. But so much of it has been corrupted by the need for self-importance that they're hard to find. Just don't tell anyone. I think it would scare them if they knew just how much I knew. Hey, kid. You need supper and rest. It's been a long day."

"Yea, it was," she said. "How many others?"

"I'm not sure. You can just about bet that those that have titles under their name have

matured. But I don't know that for sure. You know that pace that Carla took when she was wearing the kilts? That 'I'm going this way and NOTHING is going to stop me'? I think that was a statement. The others?" Tommy shrugged. "I think Bobby has matured, but it's nothing I can point my finger at. Don. Yea, I think he made it. Who else would have the gall to have 'Troublemaker' listed on his window. Or 'Bat Boy'. He's trying to pretend that he hasn't. But the way he brought Tex through that situation. Yea, I think he's another one. The rest? I don't know. But if they haven't, I don't think it will be long."

"So, what you're saying is that not everybody has to go through as rough a transition as I did."

"Nope. It's still rage. But more the type of 'it's my life and I'll live it my way' sort of thing," he said. "Talk to Muriel. She went through it. Maybe she can give you some pointers. I hate to say it, but you're still all nerve endings. For your type of transition, I'd say that was perfectly normal. But there may be a way of softening that effect, and she may know. I know that she appears to have softened it rather quickly."

"OK, oh wise one. I'll talk to her. First chance I get." She giggled. "It's hard to believe that I'm talking to you about this."

"Bobby might have been a better one," he said with a lopsided grin. "But I was here. And we all have to stick together. Muriel's orders, from back before she pulled us into Enclave. And you STILL aren't eating and resting."

"OK, OK, I'll go. Thanks again for being so understanding, Tommy."

"My pleasure, Fran." And Fran went off to supper with a lighter heart.

# Chapter 19

## The Education of Education

### (Saturday morning)

Fran was up early and eating breakfast when Mark and Tommy showed up. "What's up, guys?"

"We wanted to talk to you about the Secretary's training," Mark said. "Tommy raised an interesting point, last night. What happens if we let him translate to Home?"

"Actually, either one of them," Tommy added. "They've both been through a heck of a shock. Do we dare let them add to it with the strain of judgment?"

"Good question, and I actually have a good answer. The Envoys taking care of them talked about various things, last night, and apparently feel that they may be pretty well adjusted as it is. From what they told me, a few minutes ago, it was all very casual and 'what if's' and things like that. And they found that, prior to becoming Secretary of Education, he'd been a professor at a small college. He got the job because he was a friend of the President and the President felt sorry for him with his heart condition. Neither party felt that he was a threat to their way of thinking, because of his lack of political direction, despite the fact that he'd written many of the President's campaign speeches."

"As far as their lives went," she continued between bites, "they'd always felt it their duty to try to correct past mistakes, and had a good understanding of what they could correct and what they couldn't. What was their fault and what wasn't. No strong religious beliefs, or anything like that that would make Home a shock to them, and nothing that would be more than a minor glitch as far as the judgment went."

"However, they don't suggest doing the whole training in one day," she added, as her guests sat down to a second breakfast – coffee for Mark, and a full breakfast for Tommy. "For one thing, they feel that we should sound them out ourselves before having them translate Home. They think, get them their first two stripes today. Learn to translate tomorrow, then see if they're up to making the final trip the next day. I agree. I contacted Melanie and asked her if the President would be willing to do without his services for a few more days, and why. He came back to me, directly – and boy was that a shock to me – and readily agreed."

"So, we've got time to find out more before going for the whole thing. And time to tell them what it's actually like, if we feel that that's appropriate," she concluded.

"She's way ahead of us, Tommy."

"Nothing more than I'd expect of her," Tommy replied with a grin. "So, when do we go?" he asked Fran.

"You've got time to finish your breakfast, young man," Fran quipped.

"Yes, mother," he shot back. "You know, seriously, I'm not surprised at your becoming a doctor. You used to patch up most of our scrapes and cuts when we were younger."

"Yea, all of last year, younger," she said.

"Well, we WERE younger, then. And somehow, it seems like a lot longer, now. It's like turning a corner, when you're out walking, and no longer being able to see where you came from. Just have a memory of it."

"Interesting," Fran said. "Good imagery. Yea, it is a bit like that. By the way, how'd you two link up?"

"Oh, after he got through with the crowd, he came to see me, to see if you were all right. He'd seen you and me talking . . ."

"That's 'you and I', you know."

"Yea, but that's not the way a kid would say it. Can't have the common people realizing that I'm not really a kid anymore," he said, grinning. "Anyway, he'd seen you and I talking and was concerned about you. I told him that you were just concerned about my feeling that you were mad at me. So, we got to talking about the situation. He thought it might be a good idea if I came along. Hope you don't mind."

Fran looked at him for a moment. "You know, Tommy, every time you look innocent, I get worried. You're noted for your practical jokes. And ones not quite so practical, too."

"Nothing like that, Fran," he said. "I just got some good information on the difference between the way a man wears a kilt and the way a woman wears a skirt. It was just curiosity at first, but it led me to understand some of the basic difference in outlook between men and women."

"Would you care to share that with me?"

"Oh, it's simple, really. Women tend to be closed in and defensive. Men tend to be open and aggressive. Now, think of it in terms of how a woman – or girl – holds her legs when sitting down wearing a skirt that is knee length. Part of behavior is physical, that sets up a mental mind set. A woman smooths the skirt as she sits down, and holds her legs together. A man in a kilt lets the edge of the chair smooth the kilt behind him, and sets with his legs apart, and the sporran settled between them."

"Hmm. I think there something wrong with that argument, but I'll have to analyze it to figure out what," she said. "It just sounds too simplistic."

"It is. It's actually much more complex. But that's what it boils down to," Tommy replied. "Anyway, I'm along to help him learn to walk and sit. And no, I won't say 'good dog'."

I don't think he'd understand kid kidding.” But his grin said that he was still thinking about it.

“Well, if you two are finished, maybe we should get going,” Fran said. She suited words to action and got up and headed toward the door. Mark and Tommy followed, and managed to catch up as she started out the door. “Guest House is only a few doors down, and the exercise will do me good. I'm getting fat and lazy in my old age.” The silence her ridiculous statement caused spoke volumes. No matter how they replied to the remark they'd have been in trouble.

They were met at the door by the Secretary's wife, who insisted that they should call her Edith. “We're so excited, dear,” she said to Fran. “We'd always thought that the Envoy training was a long, hard process, and that only a select few could take it. I have no idea, really, where we got that idea,” she nattered on. “Oh, we'd always been close, ever since we met. But after we'd been married a while we realized that we knew what the other person was thinking. And that it wasn't just because of what we'd been talking about or doing, or anything like that. And to find out that the 'selection' is simply whether or not a person can make a mental link, well the rest was simple.” Their Guest House Envoys were standing back, grinning.

“Well, actually,” Fran said, “Getting the first stripe is the hardest. After that, it gets much easier. But the first two things you learn are critical. The way Muriel laid it out, everything builds off of what went before. Did your Guest House Envoys explain any of it to you?”

“Not really. They said you'd do it as we go along,” Paul said.

“Well, that's good, anyway,” Fran said. “That way you're concentrating on only one thing at a time. Look, if you don't mind, I'm going to call someone in that's trained people before. I haven't, that much. And I'd feel more comfortable if he were here, even if all he did was make sure I do thing right. OK?”

::Don? Can you help me?::

“What's up?” he said, popping in.

“Don, this is Paul MacLaren, the Secretary of Education and his wife, Edith. They want to be trained and can make a mental link already. But I've never trained anyone. Supposedly, I know how. But I'd feel more comfortable if someone were here to correct me if I'm wrong, or even take over. Hint, hint,” Fran said.

Don just laughed, then turned to the two victims . . . um . . . trainees and said, “Hi, I'm Don. And like Fran and Tommy, here, I'm one of Muriel friends from school. And yes, I've trained people before, and under difficult circumstances. You two will be easy compared to that. So easy, that I'm going to have Fran do one of you and Tommy the other, and I'll watch and make snide comments to them that you can't hear.” That brought a chuckle from Edith and outright laughter from Paul. “Seriously, I'll be monitoring to make sure that nothing goes wrong, and to give them hints if they run into trouble getting an idea across, or even making



things up as we go along to help you understand. Fran,” he said, turning to her, why don't you get Paul connected up and shielded.

“Me? First?” she squeaked.

“Yep. Remember how Muriel did it with us? Just like that,” Don said.

“Whew. OK, yes. I remember.” She reached out for Paul's mind, and got a ::Confidence, kiddo,:: in return. “All right,” she smiled at him, “just stand there and look down between your feet. Imagine that you're looking down an incredibly long tunnel, and there's a light at the end. Reach down and draw it up to you. Good! Got it the first try. Now that it knows you're here, it'll always feed you. That's your power, and what you're drawing on is the whole universe, so you don't need to worry about it running out. And you won't have to think about it, because it's always connected to you.”

She gained self-confidence as she went along, and felt Don's encouragement in her mind. She then talked him through creating a shield and attaching it to the power. A few fumbles and he had it, and learned how to draw it in and expand it back out to the default size. He also learned how to make the surface spongy-sticky, and why one of Don's titles was Bat Boy. The momentary shock was replaced by laughter as he realized that he hadn't actually been hit, and that the bat was stuck in the shield.

Then it was Tommy's turn to train Edith. He gave her a grin and a formal bow, then reached for her still chuckling mind. And away they went. She'd followed the instructions that Fran had given her husband, and was connected to her power. A few moments of thought had her shielded and learning how to draw them in and expand them. She giggled as Don struck at her with his bat, and threatened to keep it. He proved that she couldn't by pulling it from a 'no pocket', which set her to laughing.

“You cheated,” Fran exclaimed to Tommy, with her hands on her hips.

“Hey, don't blame me. They're CLOSELY linked. I tried!” The by-play had Paul and Edith laughing at their antics and in good spirits for the next effort when there was a knock at the door.

When Mark answered it, the couple from the clothing shop said, “We know that they no longer need us for making their clothing. But we do know clothing, and could help with their making their clothing. For one thing, we can duplicate their size and shape, so all they have to do is take the image from our minds and store it. It would make fitting them much easier for them. We also know Scottish formal attire, including white tie. We can have them set up in no time. And, of course, they can always come back for new styles.”

“But, are they actually making them, then?” asked Fran.

“Oh, yes. Of course. They're just not having to design them. And yes, young man, before you ask, we know about the way you have the formal men's jackets, without all that silver. And Carla was right, it looks better that way,” the male partner said. “But the kilts are

the hard part. Getting the pleats to fall just right, so that at rest they show the entire pattern of the tartan is the trick. Oh, and getting the fringe to act like fringe. But I know all the tricks of it, and we can do it.”

And, in short order, they did. First, separating the room for women and men and having the trainees undress. Then having them create something comfortable that they were used to wearing. Then on to suits and dresses, respectively, then formal wear. Paul and Edith were amazed at how soft and comfortable even the most formal attire could be, and how it could stretch to account for any movement. Even karate moves that he hadn't been able to do for years because of his heart.

When the curtain went down, Paul and Edith were still in formal clothes, facing each other, and the effect was stunning. She'd chosen a white dress, nearly floor length, with a sash that was similar to, but not the same as his. While he was in kilts with the restyled Montrose doublet and the tartan jabot that Tommy had suggested, but fringed.

“The tartans aren't the same,” Tommy said.

“No,” said Edith, “His is the MacLaren. Mine is similar, but is the tartan of my maiden name – Scot.”

“Looks GOOD,” he replied.

“But how do I keep it clean?” asked Edith.

“Simple. You don't. It CAN'T get dirty. It's not really cloth. What you have is another form of shield, with the colors added, as well as the shapes and ability to move with you that cloth would have. And what you've done is to take that idea or image and tell the shield 'be this'. That way, you can change clothes instantly, even in a mixed gender crowd, and never have to worry about modesty. It's the greatest boon to a girl that has brothers,” Fran said. “Or, so I understand from Carla.”

“Oh! Oh, my! No more washing clothes. Or having to repair them. Or buying new ones! Oh, MY! A catalog can be a complete wardrobe. Wardrobe! Never needing to have enough space for your clothes! Oh, my goodness.” Edith's exclamations came out accompanied by laughter from Paul.

“And no more polishing shoes,” Tommy added, “or belts, or any of the petty details. And no more dry cleaners . . . .”

“But . . . what do YOU get out of it?” Paul asked the people from the shop.

“Joy. We enjoy designing new clothes for people and getting them to fit just right. We are given joy in the looks on people's faces when they find out that clothing need not be uncomfortable,” said the female clothing shop partner. “And we especially enjoy helping those that have the training to acquire the images of clothing that they only imagined or partly understand, and getting them right for them. It's an art form of its own, and we have fun doing

it every day. Visitors that come to our shop, of course, pay for clothes. But they're much better than what they'd get outside Enclave, and MUCH cheaper. Guests, such as you are, and trainees, such as you've become get theirs for free. The first as a service to any guest. The latter because they're actually making the clothes themselves. We're just helping them to design them to suit their looks and physical form. In fact, the only reason that we charge anything to visitors is because they expect it. Even Enclave employees get their clothing free, and anything else, just like guests and trainees."

"Oh, and before you ask," the male partner said, "we even call those that have passed all the tests trainees. They are not like Envoys. With us, the training is part of us. You might say we're the messenger AND the message. It's what we do. But with humans . . . well . . . you have to be trained. Therefore, you're trainees. Once trained you can train others. And we're always happy to help in the training."

"Well," Fran said, "I think you've had enough excitement for today. Why don't you have lunch and nap for a while – or at least relax, then take a look around Enclave and just be normal people for a bit. Oh, and before you go," she added, "these will show any Envoys and trained people what you've accomplished." And she gave them their first two stripes. "I'm sure that your Envoys during your stay can show you how to move them around to suit what you're wearing," she said with a smile. "The first is for power and shields. The second isn't something you earned, exactly, but something you are by nature. You're protectors. You believe in education as protection, as well as protecting each other. And your friends. I'll see you tomorrow morning, and we'll decide on what happens next."

Fran took Mark and Tommy back to her office. "Well," she said to them, "they've got what they wanted. Clothes. And I'm sure that the Envoys there will be having great fun showing them 'no pockets' and talking with them."

"But you're worried about the shock of Home being too much for him. Even after all you did to heal him and get his constitution back to what it was before he had his first heart attack. AND eliminating the possibility that he'd ever have another," Mark said. "Well, I can understand that. However, he's well up to it. And he may want to go on."

"Fran, not to butt in on something medical, but no one's taught them to lock down their sending," Tommy said. "While they were making clothes, they were sending to each other. They know what Home is, now. And they suspect the judgment. No, know. And nobody told them. But it's part of the religion they were brought up in. So, they suspect that even going there voluntarily, they'll experience it. And they're ready."

"Plus, you've got Tommy, me and a room full of Envoys ready to help them," Mark said. "And no, we're not pushing you. We're trying to show you options that you might not have realized. Or at least information. Just think about it."

"I have been. I've been monitoring his body every step of the way. After yesterday, I felt it was best," Fran said. "And right off the bat, when we went in, he showed no ill effects from the shock he got yesterday. Connecting to power, it was difficult for him at first, but no strain. And once he got connected, his strength multiplied. The power just seemed to go

through his whole body, strengthening everything that I'd done, and a bunch more. Shielding, again, was difficult until I showed him step by step. But then he got it with no trouble, and made good, solid shields and collapsed them. I thought Don was going to break his bat testing him. But the shield held, and the sticky goo absorbed the impact better than anyone I've seen. And his wife was the same way, even if she did cheat and learn off of her husband."

"So?" Mark asked.

"Yea, they're ready to go the distance," Fran replied. "But today?"

"Why not? Give them a chance to calm down a bit while we work out where to send them around Enclave. The surprise them with it," said Mark.

# Chapter 20

## The Education Continues (Saturday afternoon)

When the MacLaren's had had a chance to have lunch and relax a bit, and Fran and company had a chance to select areas to send them to, Fran mentally sent to the Envoys to see if their charges would like to continue. The reply was an overwhelming 'yes'. So the three translated back to the apartment.

"I know we expected to take longer with training you. But you're doing so well, and seem so eager to continue that I thought I'd give you the opportunity. Besides, Mark and Tommy twisted my arm," she said, grinning. "So, if you're sure you want to continue . . ."

"You know," Paul said, dryly "that's just the way my mother used to coax me into begging for something."

"OK, no begging," Fran said. "What we're going to do is teach you how to go from one place to another without having to bother with all the bits in between. Now, you've already done this when you came here, but not under your own power. This time, you'll be doing it for yourselves."

And so it began. First short hops to the front desk and back, then further out to empty warehouses and the street in front of Fran's office. Then doing it, rapid fire, to all those locations alone, with a trainer only monitoring them to be sure they checked for clearance.

"OK," Fran said, "one more short trip and you're finished."

"This is the one you've been worried about, isn't it, Fran," said Paul. "The trip to Home and back."

"I should know better than to try to con an educator," she said. "Yes, to Home and back. It should be an easy trip for both of you. However, you don't have to. Or you can put it off until another time. Muriel's parents did that, and we all understood why. They weren't afraid. They just didn't see the need, since they had all they wanted."

"So, what tipped them over the edge, then," Paul asked.

"Muriel. There was going to be a party, and she was going to be featured. And her parents saw a way to show both the child and the Ambassador at the same time. So they took the trip, and surprised her at the party. And Muriel had to give them their final stripes."

"Wait! I saw that on television. You mean that she didn't know beforehand?"

"Nope," Fran said. "Everyone kept it from her. In fact, when they actually made the trip

the rest of us kids had to keep her busy working on designing uniforms so she wouldn't know."

"And how'd they do?" asked Edith.

"Oh, they sailed through it, no problem," Fran said. "You shouldn't have any problem, either."

Fran went with each of them. Sergeant Carter was there to greet them, as well as a few passed friends. And the judgment hardly affected them. Until they got back.

"Fran," Paul said, as he collapsed in a chair, "who was that old Marine?"

"Oh, Sergeant Carter? He's taken over greeting new arrivals to Home. The involuntary ones. He's also put a bunch of military, all ranks and all services, to work greeting people. Puts on quite a show for voluntary arrivals that are military. His daughter is head of the President's detail. And he's proud of her."

"Melanie? Melanie Carter is his daughter? That's Zeb Carter?" the shock was tremendous. In a quiet voice he said, "I knew him, years ago. He saved my life, then was instrumental on getting me put out of the service on a medical discharge. That was my first heart attack. Why didn't he come over?"

"Because you had others to greet you. He can see you anytime you want. You can always go back. That's what being a Citizen of Home means," Fran said. "He knew when his daughter took her second trip Home to meet with fallen squad mates. And stayed back, because this was something she needed to do without distraction. It took a third trip for her to find him, or he find her. He's a quiet man who doesn't put himself forward, but manages to get things done. He's the first human to be leader of the guides – the ones that greet the new arrivals and comforts them, and finds those that can help them regain their balance. He didn't snub you, Paul. He simply waited for a more appropriate time."

"I've got to go back," he said, and started to rise.

"Wouldn't it be better to go with your new stripes?" Fran asked? "He'll wait. He's a patient man."

He looked at her. Just looked. Then sank back into his chair. "You're telling me to calm down before I go, aren't you?"

"Well, I was hoping," Fran said, with a smile. "I won't hold you if you feel that you absolutely have to go now. But it really won't make a difference to him. And he'll be happy to see you."

"No, you're right. Can I get something to drink? Suddenly, I'm thirsty."

"Cola?" asked one of the staff.

"That would work." It was in Paul's hand almost before he stopped talking, and he took a long drink. "You're right. Sorry. It was a shock to hear that my old friend was right in front of me, and I didn't recognize him."

"How long has it been?"

"Twenty years. He wasn't a sergeant then. I knew he had a daughter, though. Heck, everybody did. He used to show us her picture. It just never hit me that Melanie Carter was his daughter. Yea, he would be proud of her. President's detail. Not an easy place to be. And you say she's trained?"

"Oh, yea. Muriel trained her. In one day. Then she turned around and trained fifteen in one day," Fran said.

"Yea, that sounds like a Carter. Never just do something when you can overdo it," and he laughed. "Yea, I'll go back and see him. And you're right. It'll wait. It's waited this long. Tomorrow."

"May we come in?" Fran hadn't even heard the knock on the door, but she recognized Muriel's voice.

Paul looked up, then started to rise. "No, please. We didn't mean to disturb you. We can come back," Muriel said.

"I wouldn't hear of it. Come in, by all means. I was just reminiscing with my doctor. She was just about to put my final stripes on me," Paul said.

"Stripes?" Muriel said, coming closer, then looking at Fran, questioningly.

"It seemed like a good idea, at the time," Fran said. "Come to think of it, it still does. Oh, Muriel, he knew Zeb Carter way back when. We were just discussing Paul's going back to see him." Muriel's eyebrows looked like they were trying to take refuge in her hairline. "Really, Muriel, are you going to doubt the word of his doctor? And take your hands off your hips, girl. You don't intimidate me any more." The hands dropped, the eyebrows dropped, the jaw dropped, and Muriel's eyes looked about to explode out of her head.

"Oh, dear," she finally said. "I leave you alone for a little while and look what happens. You grow up. Did I give you permission to do that?"

"Hmm. Good point. I don't recall asking for permission. Nope. I'm sure I didn't. Besides, you're not qualified to give it," Fran replied. "So, are you going to offer to finish putting stripes on him? Or are you waiting for me to ask? And have you considered asking him his opinion?" Meanwhile, Paul was busy looking back and forth between the two friends, and wondering where the bomb shelter was.

"Oh, Paul, in case you hadn't gotten the point, this is Muriel," Fran said, casually.

“Better known as Madam Ambassador, if you really want to cause her to go over the edge. She hates being called a Madam, and only uses the title, Ambassador, to intimidate people. Other than that, and her quirky nature, she's actually quite nice. I think. And beside her is the telephone pole we sometimes call Ted. He's nice, and we all defer to him – mostly because we're not sure exactly what he does besides get exasperated with Muriel.”

That did it. The strange contortions that Ted's face had been going through finally dissolved into shaking, then muffled snickers, and finally outright laughter. “She's got you, Muriel. You might as well give up,” he finally managed to sputter out.

“SHEESH! You raise kids, buy them shoes, send them to school and what happens . . . ,” said Muriel.

“I wouldn't complete that old one, if I were you, Muriel. I believe your mother still has her soap,” Fran said, and cracked a smile. “Now, are you going to play nice and say 'hello' to these poor people that don't know the real you?”

Fran turned back to Paul and Edith. “Mr. Secretary, Edith, may I introduce Muriel, Ambassador from Home, Ambassador TO Home, and co-leader of Home, and the one and only first Ambassador from Home, Ted, co-leader of Home. Ted, Muriel, Paul MacLaren and his wife, Edith.”

“We've met. Under less than salubrious conditions. In fact, I believe the last time we met I was a bit busy having a heart attack in your office. Sorry about that, Ambassador.”

“Oh, no you don't. After my getting told off like that, you can't get away with using titles on me. I'm Muriel. And I'm happy to see that having a heart attack didn't keep you down.”

“Actually, I don't think I was allowed to stay down. Your friend is a very good doctor, you know,” Paul said.

“Well, I didn't know exactly how good until I saw her in action. Now, what's this about stripes?”

“Well,” Paul said, “We just got back from Home, and Fran was suggesting that it might be time to finish putting stripes on us. I hope you won't feel put out, but, after everything that's happened, I feel that she should be the one to apply them.”

“I won't argue with that,” Muriel said. “Have you selected a gem or metal for your braid?”

“Well, I think Edith and I have an idea of what we want, but we hadn't told Fran yet.”

“As you can see from Muriel and Ted, it's possible to braid two colors together. They did it to show that they operated together as Ambassadors. But we've had people that were married that also joined their colors. It's especially effective if the colors are contrasting.”



"I think we can do that," Paul said. "I like amber, and Edith likes jadeite. That's the green, harder version of jade. And yes, if you can do it, I think we'd like to have them braided together."

"I think that can be done," Fran said with confidence. ::Muriel! Help!::

::No sweat, tiger. Here's how you do it::

::Thanks!::

"So, if you'll stand up . . . good." And she applied the stripes.

"Now, m'lady," Paul said to his wife, "why don't we show them the reason we wanted them." She grinned back as they changed into their formal clothes.

"Whoa! So that's what they look like in color. And two different tartans?" Muriel asked.

"Oh," Edith replied, "his is the MacLaren, of course. Mine is for my maiden name, the hunting version of the Scot tartan. Though I'm not hunting any more. I bagged my limit." And they all laughed.

"I have a formal dinner to go to, next week. Tommy was nice enough to show me what Scottish formal wear could look like. But he forgot to turn off his stripes. I'm afraid that's what started the war," Paul said.

"Oh, nonsense. There wasn't any war," Fran said. "Just a minor misunderstanding. And you weren't even the target."

"Well, I'm glad it all worked out. Or at least it appears to have," he said to Fran. Then turning to Muriel, "the reason I was in your office when I collapsed was to ask you how to go about getting old fuddy-duddies to understand that there was a new standard. Somehow, though, I think I answered my own question. Many of them will be at that party. And seeing me with the stripes that show that I've taken the training is going to silence a lot of them. I'll have the papers recognizing your accreditation ready as soon as I get back to DC. And I'll start hammering on the various licensing organizations to see that your licenses are recognized. And that includes medical. They couldn't have saved me, with the skills they have. You did. I'd say that actions speak louder than all their hot air."

"If you really want to crush their egos, Paul," Ted said, "tell them how long the procedure took, and how much more was accomplished than they could have done."

"I'm not sure I know how long it took."

"Oh, it was about five minutes from the time we got you on Muriel's recliner," Fran said. "Sorry it took so long, but you were a mess inside. One of my supporting doctors did nothing but pull stents and strengthen arteries."

"Five minutes . . . Pull stents . . . ."

"Oh, and unclog arteries. Really, it probably could have gone faster, but it was my first heart procedure," Fran said.

"Fran," Ted said, "I think you're showing off. That procedure, in a human hospital, would have taken hours, and it's doubtful that the patient would have lived. And human doctors don't have the ability to strengthen arteries or unclog them. Much less keep the blood flowing and oxygenated the way your other supporting doctor did. Or do what you did with his heart."

"Oh, my. Now I really have to sit down. And you did this all in Muriel's office, on her recliner?" Paul asked.

"Oh, of course. It would have taken too long to move you. Even translating," Fran said.

"It's too bad there was no record made of it. That would have shown the medical profession where the bar was now being placed," Paul said.

"Well, from the outside, it would have looked like nothing was happening. Just three people standing around," Fran said.

"Well," Mark said, "actually there is a way, if you give me a couple of minutes. I'll have to splice some things together, and translate mental communication to physical speech. And I'm not sure you should see it, so soon after it happening to you. Oh, and Muriel, I need from the point where you realized he had a problem to the point where he was on the table, so to speak." He was silent for about ten minutes, while the others talked around him. Then he brought out two CD's. "Here you are, sir. And one for you, Fran, for your records. I'm afraid it'll take a wide screen to handle it. Some of it's in split-screen with three different views. Oh, and I put up a clock in one corner showing elapsed time from, as best as I can tell, the onset of the attack to the time that Fran got your heart beating again. Five minutes and ten seconds. She collapsed, afterward, of course. But I think that was from the strain of it being her first major procedure under tense conditions."

"It was just adrenaline that had no place to go," Fran said. "Nothing serious. I just had to let it wash out of my system."

"Yes, well, the medical association and licensing boards are going to get their ears pinned back," Paul said. "They're going to watch this, and probably call it fraud and fake, and I'll lower the hammer. The President's got two more years on this term. So, that's their limit. If they can't reach that bar in two years, their accreditation will end. They'll be decertified. Be prepared for a LOT of students. In all fields. You say that your training was done through a mental link?"

"Yes," Fran said. "About five minutes per discipline. They open up over a period of two to three days and are usable after that. I was dealing with scraped knees and upset

stomachs two days after it was dumped into me. Also childhood diseases – we've had kids break out in measles, mumps and chicken pox, here, and contained it as well as curing the child. I usually don't get walk-ins, because I usually go where the problem is and solve it on the spot."

"Per discipline," Paul said. "Just how many disciplines do you have?"

"Well, I'd have to check my wall, but at least three, right now," Fran replied. "Medicine, of course, and psychiatry and psychology. I'd have to ask the head of Muriel's training squad what the rest of them are."

"Three disciplines," Paul said, trying to get his head around the idea. "Three disciplines, and you don't know how many more. And you're twelve years old. America definitely needs to change the way it educates its young. Which is why I came back to talk to Muriel. Speaking of which, Muriel, do you have to have the training to take the courses?"

"Not really, though we suggest it," she said. "For courses that don't require Envoy training, all that's needed is the ability to make a mental link. That's what we do with the kids that are in the school we run. Just normal, everyday kids from the City. We drop a load on them and let it open up, then take them out into the real world and show them how that knowledge is actually used. We were going to do such with my friends, and did to an extent. But they'd been let run wild for so long that they'd already started looking for what they liked. By that point, they'd already had the equivalent of a high school education."

"You know," Muriel said, as an afterthought, "you've got the training, now. Oh there are other things you could learn about it, but you've got the basics to build with. If there are any disciplines that would help you in your job, we could probably put them together for you. Besides, I get the feeling that Fran would like you to stay a couple of days and relax before going back to your job and the rat-race that DC is. In fact, talking about relaxing, I think we should get out of here and let you relax now. You know where to find us," she added, and mentally suggested that the others leave, too.

# Chapter 21

## An End of Childhood (Saturday evening)

::Lily, can I talk to you?: Fran asked.

::Of course, dear. You're mother's here, too.::

::Oh, dear. I was afraid of that.::

::She wants to know when you'll be coming home. I've tried to tell her that it depends on her and your father, but she just doesn't seem to listen.::

::Then I'm afraid that what I have to tell her is something that she won't like. She wants everything to go back to the way it was. And it never can. Dad made sure of that when he threw me out. And if she's feeding him the same stuff, then any hope of reconciliation is out of the question.::

::I know. And she won't accept that from me,:: Lily sent. ::Despite the fact that it's apt to be a major blowup, I think you should be the one to tell her – set her straight. She won't even talk to Bobby. Fred and I have tried to convince her, but she just won't listen.::

::OK, I'll see her some time, then. You shouldn't be involved when I do it. You don't need to be put in that position.::

::I don't see why not, dear,:: Lily said. ::We've been involved in it. We understand your position. Perhaps even better than you do. We went through it with Muriel, after all. Come over and let her know where you stand and why. She's needs to hear it from you. We're in the kitchen.::

“Hi, Lily. Hi mom,” Fran said with a sigh as she translated in.

“Fran, honey, that's not the way you should address an adult. You know that. And that popping in and out just isn't appropriate,” her mother said.

“Mother,” Fran said, sadly, “you're trying to get me to go back to the way I was before dad threw me out. It's not going to happen. First, Lily has asked me to address her that way, as one adult to another. It doesn't take away any of the respect that I have for her, or she for me. Second, I'm trained. And I won't be un-trained. Third, I have a position, here. I'm a doctor. And a good one. I just saved a man's life because of the knowledge and skills that I have.”

“Oh, I'm sure if you just come back and forget all that stuff that your father would accept you back.”

"Mother, it's not up to him to accept me back," Fran said. "He has to accept that I am who I am and apologize for the mess he created. And as long as you keep feeding him this lie that I'll come back and be a dutiful, stupid little girl he won't get any better. It's not going to happen. You both have to realize that being a doctor and being trained in Envoy techniques is who I am. If you can't accept that, then there's no point in my seeing you again. It was your husband that made the decision to cut me off from the family. And you backed him up. Fine. But, now it's up to you two to realize that reality doesn't change just because you wish it."

"Oh, dear, you really must stop this childish fantasy you've been going through. People just aren't like that, you know. We are your parents, and we have a responsibility to see that you're raised properly. Now, you just come along and stop this nonsense, and everything will be all right," her mother said.

"I see. No, mother, I won't be coming back under those conditions. I am no longer the beaten down little girl that worships something that doesn't and never did really exist. And I refuse to look down on people that don't think the way you do or follow ridiculous rules that have no purpose other than to foster guilt in my own mind," Fran said, with a sigh. "Mother, I'd hoped it wouldn't come to this."

"Well, dear, if you won't come back willingly, then we'll have to make sure that you come back anyway. We can't have you just running away because of a little tiff," her mother said.

"Which means that you've contacted the police to arrest me as a runaway. It won't work, mother. It'll only make you and dad, and the police, look foolish." She pulled out a document and laid it on the table. "This is a court order. You failed to show up, even though you'd been notified of the action, so the court awarded this by default. I am, legally, no longer your daughter. I have an income of my own, far more than you can understand. I also have adult supervision, though that's not necessary. And I have a place to live. I have emancipated minor status by the laws of America, that's what the court order says. In addition, I am a Citizen of Home, and as such am considered an adult under Home's law."

"I'm sorry, mother. I've tried to be patient with you and give you time to realize that things were different – that it was up to you and dad to accept me. You've refused, and now you've tried to get the police involved. You would never have needed to see this court order if you'd just stopped living in a fantasy world and wake up to reality. I suggest that you call the police and cancel that action before you and they get into some serious trouble."

"Lily, I'm sorry you had to see this," Fran said.

"Quite all right, Fran," Lily said. "We understand, Fred and I. And we'll continue trying. I suggest that you stay in Enclave until you can get that police action straightened out, though."

"I will. Well, I'd better get out of here and stop bothering you. Thanks for having me

over, Lily. And I'll see you again, sometime," Fran said, and translated to Muriel's office.

"I need a friend," Fran said, as she entered.

"You've got one," Muriel promptly replied. "What happened?"

"I sent to your mother, to see if I could talk to her. My mother was there, and yours suggested that it was about time to let her know where I stand."

"I take it that it didn't go well?" Muriel asked.

"Worse than that. She's living in a fantasy world. She refuses to accept that I'm my own person, and has called the police and claimed I'm a runaway," Fran said. "I showed her the court order declaring me emancipated, and it meant nothing to her."

"Oh, dear! OK, no going outside Enclave until we can get that stopped." Muriel looked blank for a bit, then said, "I've got one of our lawyers on it. But, depending on when she called the police, they may try to pick you up anyway. I've alerted Bob, and he'll have his squad on the lookout for any stray police coming into Enclave. I've also alerted Tex to the problem. He suggested sending to Henry. You took this action in Federal court, didn't you?"

"No. State. It had to go through Superior Court in this county. But I asked the lawyer about what that would mean in other states. I haven't heard back, yet, though. Oh, and here's a snicker. Because I'm under sixteen, I have to have a guardian to look out for my safety. Ted was named as a responsible adult," she said.

"Wait! What? He can't be! He's not a citizen of this country! He doesn't even have a last name! How?" asked a very shocked Muriel.

"That's the snicker. The judge asked me where I was living and how I'd manage to get food, clothing, education, medical attention, and stuff like that. So I showed him my passport and told him that all that, and my room at Guest House, are covered under my salary as Ambassador of Home. I even added that I had my own security squad to protect me. I didn't tell him that I was a doctor. He wouldn't have understood. I did mention that, when dad threw me out I went straight to Enclave and asked for asylum. I also asked Ted if he'd come to the hearing. He came in, apologized to the Court for being late, and said that he'd be happy to act as my guardian. The judge approved it on the spot."

"Didn't he ask what you do as an Ambassador?"

"Yep. I told him that I work mostly with kids. I think he got the idea that it meant that I told them about Enclave and Home, and stuff like that. My lawyer backed up my asylum status, too, adding that I'd been under adult supervision since I came to Enclave. So, he waived the three month 'on my own' condition due to the extreme circumstances, and said that it wouldn't be a full emancipation in that I can't sign contracts or make debts, and that my salary, minus maintenance, would have to be banked. My lawyer assured him that my maintenance was actually covered separately from my salary, and that my salary went into a

trust fund that I could only touch when I reached my majority, and that no one else could touch. That food, shelter, clothing, education, protection and medical were all part of the basic employment package for any employee at Enclave, and weren't deducted from my salary. Then she showed him a record of my earnings to date, minus applicable taxes and including investments. He asked Ted how he could get a job in Enclave. Ted 'mysteriously' suggested that he come out and talk, sometime."

"You DO know, don't you, that snookering a judge is a criminal offense," Muriel said.

"Who? Me? I'm just a little girl. How could I snooker a judge that's much smarter than me"

"Oh, you're a bad girl. You snooker judges and play doctor."

"I do NOT play doctor," Fran said, with indignation. "I mean every moment of it." she primly and quietly added, and busted out laughing and Muriel joined her.

"Excuse me." One of Bob Garcia's security squad was at the door. "Fran, there's a sheriff's deputy outside that says he needs to see you immediately."

"Really. Is he hurt or does he have a disease?"

"No, ma'am. And he's fairly agitated."

"Any idea why he'd be that agitated?" asked Fran. ::Ted, I think we have a winner in the 'let's be the next victim to try to grab Fran' contest.::

::On it. Bring Muriel when you come out,:: he sent back.

"No idea, ma'am. But if I had to guess, I'd say that he really doesn't want to be here," the guard replied.

"Well, if this is what I think it is, he may NOT want to be here. Muriel, would you come with me, please? Ted will meet us outside," Fran said.

"Darn straight, I'll come with you. Squads! Outside, ring the doorway. Intruder alert." When Muriel and Fran left her office it was to see a sheriff's deputy held between two security guards, and both Muriel's and Ted's security squads ringing the area in two curved rows.

"Hello. You wanted to see me?" asked Fran.

"Miss, you'll have to tell these two . . . uh, persons to release me, and come with me."

"Bold, aren't you. Well, these aren't my squad. You'll have to ask their boss to release you. Oh, and as for coming with you, not possible," Fran replied. "Now, I think you need to state your business, here in front of witnesses, so we know what to tell the judge. Please feel free to make your story as complete as possible. Gaps in the story could cause me to get a

bit . . . testy.”

“Miss, I have a warrant for your arrest as a runaway,” he said.

“Uh, huh. Not complete. Now try again. Who gave you the warrant? Who initiated the action? And why do you think you can kidnap me out of an Embassy?” Fran gently asked.

“Miss, you're outside the Embassy.”

“Actually, she isn't,” Ted said, from behind him. “The entire Enclave is the Embassy.”

“Oops,” Muriel said. “Someone else that doesn't bother doing his homework.”

“Now, who initiated the action, and who gave you the warrant?” Fran repeated.

“Um, it was give to me by the Sheriff, and the action was brought by your mother.”

“That's what I thought. Ted, would you be so kind as to have the Sheriff brought here? I think he should see this, so he'll understand the futility of this action. Muriel, would you ask Tex to bring a couple of people here? I think that we may have need of his services, since I intend to see some people in front of a judge as soon as possible for attempted kidnapping.” Fran was beginning to show signs of anger. “And bring my mother.”

In very short order Tex, with two men and Fran's mother, were on one side of the deputy. On the other was the Sheriff. And Fran was starting to radiate. “Now, people, I'm going to show you something. And you're going to read it. And then you're going to be arrested and charged with attempted kidnapping. And then we're going to see a judge, and he can decide what to do with you. And when he gets through with you, you'll end up back here, facing the leaders of Home for offenses against Home and the Embassy.” She pulled out the order of emancipation and showed it to each of them. “Now, get this trash out of here before I become irritated.” The glow increased. “And Ted, I hope you have something suitable that will convince these . . . people once and for all that attempting to kidnap an Ambassador and emancipated doctor is not to be tolerated.”

“Oh, I think that can be arranged, Fran. I'm a little disturbed, myself, since I know for fact that the Sheriff knows that Enclave, as a whole, is an Embassy. He and I have had this discussion before. Must be election year, because I see a lot of media out front, and in helicopters. So, he must be on his 'family values' pitch again, shortly to be followed by 'illegal aliens'. Naughty, naughty, Sheriff. I'll finish what the Department of Justice couldn't. You see, I don't have any political agenda to worry about. I just see that justice is done. Tex?”

“Not this time, Ted,” Henry showed up with some men. “Tex, I'll take them. By entering Enclave they made this a Federal offense. We even have a judge standing by. Fran, I'll have to ask you to come to the hearing to verify the charges. You'll need a lawyer and your guardian with you, of course. It'll be Monday morning, and I'll send details to you as soon as I have them, myself.”



“Send the details to me, Henry. I’m her legally appointed guardian as well as the representative of Home and Enclave,” Ted said.

“And make sure that you indicate the size of the room. I’ll be there, too, along with a squad and one of Ted’s squads. We may bring some others to verify events and act as support for Fran,” Muriel said. “Oh, and ask the judge to allow the media in. Without cameras, if necessary, but there to witness justice being served. This has gotten out of hand. It’s time that people realized that taking action against a friendly foreign nation and its representatives is not appropriate. And that it can mean jail time for perpetrators, as well as whatever action Home decides to take against them.” Henry just grinned.

## Chapter 22

### The Weakness of Politics (Monday morning)

"That has to be the wildest thing I've ever seen," Fran said, "I thought there was going to be a trial, or something."

"There was," Ted said. "That was a bench trial. No jury. The only reason that Henry arrested them was to get them into the courtroom. Do you remember your lawyer saying that you didn't want to press charges, you just wanted them to stop harassing you and accept the fact that they'd blown it?"

"Well, I don't remember that it was in those terms, but something like that," she replied.

"That took it out of being a criminal trial and put it as a civil action. The sheriff would have fought a criminal action tooth and nail, and his lawyer would have done his best to confuse a jury into thinking that he was justified in getting the warrant," Ted said.

"So, that was why there was no jury?"

"Almost," replied Ted. "Actually, it was because it was a civil trial and the other side didn't request one. The judge never really gave them a chance to. He just asked for the evidence. Without a jury, he became the trier of fact, the one to determine what the facts of the matter were. The deputy handed up the warrant. Your lawyer handed up the emancipation judgment, which pre-dated it, along with the transcripts of the records we had from you, Muriel, her parents, and other sources. The judge read them, noted the dates, and slammed the Sheriff for having gone ahead and gotten the warrant on only the word of your mother. Then he set the restitution that each would have to make. And, thanks to the media being there, he's now a laughingstock instead of a political figure."

"Wait a minute! The Sheriff was a political figure?" asked Fran.

"Oh, definitely. First, it's an elected office. Second, he's been agitating in all sorts of ways for all sorts of things. It's why he tried to get the Envoys, here, declared illegal aliens. It made him look important. But the clauses in the Treaty defeated that before he could take any action." Ted stopped and took a drink of soda. "What he did, here, though was just plain stupid. He knew or should have known that Enclave, as a whole, was an Embassy and that he had no jurisdiction here. But he thought he could bluff it through, and gain jurisdiction by default."

"Oh, that's what that 'knew or should have known' statement was all about," Fran said. "The judge used it twice, I remember. Once concerning the fact that I was emancipated from my parents. The second time in referring to attempting to arrest me in an Embassy."

"Yep. In front of the media. So he has no excuse for trying to bring it up again – the media would ridicule and humiliate him. It's now a dead issue. Both of them are, and he's left looking foolish. In fact, that's kinda the way to take on politics. It's weakness is that the people involved are power happy. They try to 'interpret' the law to suit themselves, and carve out larger 'empires' than they actually have a mandate for." He took another swallow of soda. "You know, all this talking is dry work. Anyway . . . he just got his feathers trimmed on two counts, here. His jurisdiction ends at our property line, and he can't touch you even if you go outside of Enclave. Unless you clearly break the law. And even then, because you're an Ambassador, it would be touchy. Same goes for any of your friends. Including the one, over there, sitting in her recliner pretending that she's ignoring us."

"Something else was determined, too," said the one sitting in her recliner. "We've got to thank Paul for that one. The Sheriff tried to say that Fran wasn't employed because she wasn't a real, certified doctor. Paul pulled rank on him. The fact that he's the Secretary of Education, and he accepted the University of Home as being accredited blew that one out of the water. And you, Fran, producing diplomas and licenses to practice issued by the University of Home and Home's medical board nailed it down tight."

"So, why didn't we pull that humiliation stunt on the 'guests' that the President brought out here?" Fran asked.

"Too many, too diverse, to complicated a set of circumstances. So we had to use law instead of public humiliation. And the variety of charges that were brought against them were too numerous to take them on one at a time. One at a time, we might have managed it. But for a group that size it wasn't possible. And had we tried it one at a time, then their slot would have been filled by someone else before it even had a chance to get cold. By the way," Muriel said, "most of them plead guilty and are simply awaiting sentencing. No fear, there. None of them will ever see the outside of a prison again. The rest? Well some died, of course. And the others are awaiting trial. But the evidence is stacked so far against them that, even if they manage to make some sort of plea bargain, they still won't ever get out of prison."

"It just seemed all so informal," Fran said.

"It was, in a sense. Judges have some latitude in how they conduct a trial. He simply used the rules to cut through the cruft – something he could do once the attempted kidnapping charge was dropped," Ted said. "After that, it was just a matter of presenting the facts of the case – the evidence of who did what and when. It was a matter of law that you had been emancipated. You had been removed from your parents custody by a Superior Court of the state. Therefore, there was no subsequent action your mother could take to try to reclaim you. She'd had her chance to try to get you back – she'd been called to that hearing for your emancipation and hadn't shown up. Oh, hi Paul."

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you," said Paul. "Edith and I felt that we should go back to Washington and convince the President that I'm still alive and all right. I hope you don't mind."

"Of course not," Ted said. "And you realize that with your new status you can always come back to visit, or to stay for a while. Citizens have the same status as Guests and Employees, here. You wouldn't be charged for anything."

"Oh, by the way, some kid named Jeff asked me to tell you that he had something to show you. He asked you to meet him out front," Paul said.

"Oh?," Ted replied. "He's not out there."

"He said he'd show up shortly after you get out there."

The group tramped out to the front of Muriel's office. Seconds later, around the corner came . . . a car! A car like none that were manufactured or sold in America. It was being expertly driven by the head of maintenance. But it made no sound, other than the low 'crunch' of the tires on the large paving stones. It stopped in front of Muriel's doors, and Jeff got out.

"I thought you might like to see this," he said. "We've been working on it for a while, making sure that we had things like suspension and frame right. Style doesn't matter, as long as it's balanced between size and weight to permit proper handling."

"What's causing it to move?" asked Muriel.

"An application of power converted to electricity, like is done for Enclave, but in a smaller form. Creating the motors was a bear. We thought of using traction motors for each wheel, like are used on railroads, and finally decided that we were better off with just a single motor and a transmission and transfer case. It's all wheel drive, of course. The transmission is an application of the variable speed belt drive used in some factories," Jeff said. "It's been tested on a track built out back, and can do zero to sixty in about six seconds. And there's no fall off of acceleration with increased speed."

"You realize, don't you," Ted said, "that you just turned us into car manufacturers."

"Yep. Reduced pollution, reduced use of fossil fuels, easier maintenance, at least by someone that's trained. Also better traction, better handling, and will handle almost any terrain. It's also safer and more comfortable. One of the guys over in the grocery warehouses tried it out on rough terrain and says he'd like to take it up on the Rubicon course that various four wheel drive vehicles use to test their abilities."

"And you came up with it?" Ted asked.

"Yea, well, it was just something that I was playing with," Jeff replied. "No big thing. Really. I did it in my off-time when I was trying to figure out Muriel's question. Oh, and I got that, too, Muriel. The people that were affected by the televised image of judgment square all had three dimensional televisions by one particular manufacturer. One of the churches had 3D cameras in it, courtesy of the Envoys. That image was different than the flat images of the others. It made them feel that they were really there. Also, the circuitry was close to what we

use in our computers to view records and get everything, including thoughts. It was just an unfortunate combination of technology and events.”

“Oh, wow! And that's why it was a small number of people compared to the population. The sets are so new that only a small percentage of people have one. Ted?” Muriel asked.

“I see where you're going. I'll see about getting one of those TV's, and we'll see what they do with disks like what Melanie made for the art gallery. Jeff, let me know who the manufacturer is. If it can pick up what is on Melanie's disk, then we may need to caution them about the circuitry, and suggest new ways to design it.”

“Oh, OK, I didn't think of that. I'll have to dig the name of the company out,” Jeff said.

“And you mean to tell me that you designed a car as a way to relax from looking for the answer to that problem?” Muriel asked.

“Yea. Well, the car was just putting things together in the least complex form that would do the task. Maintenance actually built it. Oh, and the system for power to electricity that's used in the car is more efficient than what Enclave is currently using. So he's got a crew building a new station. Should be finished about Wednesday. He said that they'd do a staged switch-over when it's complete.”

“OK, young man,” Muriel said, trying to look severe, “you're getting 'Engineer' listed on your window, and this time you're not to remove it. Anyone that can do all that deserves it. Oh, and if I remember right, Triple E has a car manufacturer as one of the companies. I want you to take charge of it. Not the business side – we'll leave that with the current general manager. But the engineering side and the decision making side as to what cars you build and how you build them. Get with Don, too, and get practiced at training. You say only those that are trained can build them, fine, but then we'll have to get the crew trained to do it.”

“But . . . where do we get the trainees for me to practice on?” Jeff asked.

“There's all those kids at school. Don's working his way through them, but he could use the help. And you need the practice. Because you'd be in charge of training people in the company,” Muriel said.

“O-K. But I'm really not an engineer. I mean, yea, I have the degree and licenses and stuff. But this was just playing around!”

“Jeff,” Ted said, softly, “one of the things I leaned in a long and ugly life was that the things that you're best at are the things you tend to do to relax or do well at as a job because you enjoy them. Most people in this country don't have the opportunity to choose something like that, or even the resources to find out what they're good at. You've found out. Oh, it may not be the only thing. But it'll do for a start. And by the time you've got the job so that you're just overseeing and making occasional changes to better your design, you'll be ready to think about whether you want to stay with that or go on to something else. And you'll have the time to do it.”

"Yea," Muriel added, "and as for 'just playing around' . . . well . . . I've seen inventions that weren't as life-changing as this made by engineers that made a big thing of it. Do you have a lawyer in the Enclave pool? Because it looks like you may need a slew of patents and copyrights on this. Patents on the car and copyrights on your drawings. In fact, never mind. I'll talk to the lawyers and make sure one is assigned to you, and meets with you about this. How much of this relies on technology from the world outside of Enclave?"

"Not much. That's what took so long. In fact, I don't think any of it does. I never really knew how cars were built, so I just invented and designed as I went along. That's why it takes Envoy training to build them. Most of what's there looks and feels like metal, but it's actually shields powered by the connected power," Jeff said.

"We also need to see about whether this is street legal, and getting it licensed," Ted said. "And how long would it take to create a small fleet of them?"

"I don't know about how long it would take to build a fleet. We built this in one day. But that was after a lot of futzing around with the separate elements of it, to get them right. Oh, and someone with training can get a lot more out of it than an untrained person. Like making it a convertible and such. But really, one a day would be what I'd expect from a small group of people. More people, more cars. You can also do trucks, and really just about anything you want," Jeff said.

"I think Muriel is right. You need to take over the guidance of the company. There's nothing that can be done about this year. But next year's models could certainly be affected," Ted said. "I'll see about getting this one made street legal and licensed and insured so you can show it off to people. We've got time on this, Jeff. Time for you to get comfortable with your new position and time to get a product out. So don't panic. Yet," he said with a grin. "One thing I do want to do, as soon as you've got copyrights and patents taken care of, is to slap the company's name on it, so that Motor Vehicles won't glitch on it."

"OK, I'm going to talk to Triple E and ask them to notify the company that they now have a prototype car that needs plates. Jeff, what do you want to call this model?" Muriel asked.

"How about 'Stealth'. It's quiet and you can't hear it coming. Oh, and it's probably radar invisible, too, but we don't need to tell people that," he said, kidding.

"Got it. 'Stealth' it is," Muriel replied.

::Frederica, can you get ahold of the car company we own – geez, I don't even know it's name – and tell them that they've got a prototype car, now, that needs license plates?::

::Sure! Hold on.:: Frederica got back to her in about a minute. ::They've got plates, they just need information. Here's the plates,:: she sent, and the plates arrived on Muriel's desk. ::All we need is how many doors, what powers it, and who's authorized to drive it. It'll go under the company insurance, too.::

Muriel gave her the information, then turned to Ted. "It's licensed and insured under the company's name. I listed the head of our maintenance section as the authorized driver. Oh, and Frederica has the information on Jeff. We'll probably get a visit, shortly."

She no more than said that than a man showed up accompanied by an Envoy. "Whoosh! Now THAT'S a way to travel. Who's Muriel?" he asked.

"Me. Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Al Herald. I'm head of engineering for the car company. What's this about a prototype? And electric? We haven't had much luck with selling electric cars," he said.

"How about one that can do zero to sixty in about six seconds?" Jeff chimed in. "Better traction, better handling, higher road clearance, and using technology that you don't have?"

"Show me. And who are you?"

"I'm Jeff, and the car's behind you. Sorry, I don't know what the top speed is, just yet. We need a long, straight stretch of road that can be blocked off for a half hour or so to find out. Oh, and cooperative police, but I think we can cover that."

Al looked the car over, met the head of maintenance and immediately thought that he was the inventor, asking him questions about the car and its capabilities, then realizing that he was an Envoy. The head of maintenance just pointed to Jeff.

"You?" asked Al.

"Yep. Certified in electrical, chemical, structural, mechanical, civil, and computer engineering. Long story. I'm also an Ambassador, if that helps. Oh, and I guess I'm supposed to be your boss in a sense," Jeff said.

"Is this whole place run by kids?" asked Al.

"Nope. That tall guy, over there, with the sour look on his face is the original Ambassador from Home. Then he recruited that girl, next to him, by the name of Muriel. And she brought in twelve more kids. I'm one of them," Jeff said. "You don't have Envoy training, do you?"

"Nope. Couldn't understand it when the manager came around. Oh, I'm not against it, I just don't know what it is and does."

"Well," Jeff said, "to really understand this car you really need it. What the training does is give you power. Think of it like electricity or something. Then there's shields, and the ability to make things, like clothes. And travel – you just got a taste of that. And finally, Citizenship in Home, by going their yourself and coming back, alive."

"Dangerous?" asked Al.

"Not really, no. The thing is that there's very few of us, yet, that have done it. Most people go there involuntarily, when they die."

"WHAT! You mean, it's . . . ."

"Exactly, Al. That's what the fourth and fifth stripe, here," Jeff said, indicating his epaulettes, "signify. Or this," and he handed Al his passport.

"Not everybody gets to be Ambassador, Al," added Ted. "It's something we did with Muriel because the Envoys insisted on it. Just like they insisted that she be a co-leader of Home. The rest of her friends were made Ambassadors because of various political maneuvering that was going on at the time. But we've never had reason to rescind it. They're good kids. And when they're not goofing around, here in Enclave, they've added a great deal to the Envoy's knowledge of humans. They've also added a great deal to our ability to understand ourselves. And, they've taught Envoys how to have fun."

"Anyway," Jeff said, "to build these cars we need people that can take the Envoy training. So, go with the maintenance supervisor and take a look at it on the track. Then off into the wild area we have. See what you think. If you're interested, then come back and we'll see if you can take the training."

"I don't need to. Envoys don't lie. I don't think you can, either. So, how do you find out if I can take the training?" Al asked.



# Chapter 23

## A Car is Born

(Monday late morning)

While Jeff put Al through the basic 'knock-knock' gag to make a mental link, Paul said his final goodbyes. "It's not often that one actually gets to see history in action. And less often that you get to participate in it. I've been blessed. And my wife and I will be back to see you, sometime," he said.

"We'll miss you both, Paul," Muriel said.

"Just, next time can you try to make it a little less exciting?" asked Fran.

"I'll make a point of it. But I really have to go," Paul said. "Edith's already translated our luggage back to our home. I'll go with her, then pay a visit to the President. That ought to shake him up. You see, I called from here a few minutes ago, and told him I was feeling better. He knew it was here by the area code on caller ID. And it's normally a good six hour flight from here." And he grinned. And everyone laughed.

Muriel turned around and looked for Jeff, but he was gone, and so was Al. Fran was headed back to her office. Contacting Frederica and Alice Wilson quickly told her that neither Triple E nor the lawyers had anything for her to do. In her office, Doug was finishing up connecting a new television to her computer. He handed her a pair of glasses, and inserted a disk of the media feed of her bringing down judgment square on the various churches. The scenes changed from church to church, and one brought on a familiar feeling of self-examination.

"That's it, Doug. Jeff nailed it. It's only when the scene is in three dimensions AND is run on this particular model television that the effect is felt. Now, let's see if Melanie's disk does the same sort of thing by showing her emotions when she viewed the artwork."

Doug exchanged the disks, and in five minutes they had the answer. "It works," Muriel said. "Yet the normal, flat, computer monitor isn't three dimensional and creates the same effect. I think we've got two things going, here. One is that the computer and television both have some circuitry that passes non-visual, non-audio signals that the brain can interpret. Second, is that the cameras that recorded that scene in the church somehow pick up the signal – or whatever it is – from judgment square in a method that can be recorded by ordinary equipment," Muriel said. "I think we need to talk to the manufacturers of both. But in a non-accusative manner. We don't want to limit development, only demonstrate the possible problems that their circuitry has the potential to cause."

"We'll need Jeff," Doug said. "We'll need his schematics of the computers and the television. Too bad we can't get the schematics of the camera, too."

"Maybe we can. Let me see if I can find out who manufactures it, then talk to the manufacturer, myself, and see about a loan. Or at least a time when Jeff can look into it," she replied.

::No need,:: Jeff sent. ::I talked to the studio that sent the camera. I've seen it, and can draw the circuitry that causes the problem. Let me get AI trained. I'll talk to you tomorrow. Don and I are busy::

"Woof! Am I leaking that much?" asked Muriel.

"No – well, I don't think so," Doug said. "I think he was following the conversation with half a mind, suspecting that you might be thinking about it. After all, it's been on your mind for a while, now, and he just gave you the answer."

"And now I'm left with the problem unfinished," Muriel said. "I HATE it when I can't finish something."

"I know. You've always been a 'right now' person," Doug said.

::Muriel, can you come to the conference room, please?: Alice asked, plaintively.

"What's up, Alice," she said, as she translated in. "Oh. I bet I know where they came from and what needs to be done with them. Sorry. Jeff is kinda busy, right now, training the head of design for the car company. These are his drawings, and he needs them copyrighted and the information on them patented."

"Jeff. Skinny little kid with a shock of red hair that goes everywhere. An engineer. And designer." Alice made them sound like declarative statements.

"Yep. And licensed as a Professional Engineer in the various disciplines," added Muriel.

"Uh, huh. Multiple disciplines. Right," Alice said. "OK, copyrights are easy. We just make up a couple of copies and send them off with a check. They're actually copyrighted right now, since he has his name on them. But this registers it, and makes it more difficult for someone to steal. Patents – well, actually we don't have anyone that's a patent lawyer, I don't think. And Jeff will probably have to explain some of this to the lawyer, anyway. Probably all of it. This looks nothing like the stuff my father used to draw."

"Your father was an engineer?"

"Yea. And he worked on cars for a while when I was in high school. I even took some drafting, but decided I wanted to get into law, instead. But this stuff! No indications as to finish. Just views showing dimensions of parts and giving part numbers, then exploded and assembled views of an assembly. But what the heck is a 'frictionless bearing'? There just isn't any such thing!"

"There may be, if it's made out of a shield," Muriel said. "And that would explain why he doesn't list the actual material that a part is made out of. The whole thing is made from shields, right down to the tires."

"Oh! My gosh! He's flat telling people that they can't even begin to think about stealing his method of making it, because they don't have the training," Alice said. "That's cruel. With the drawings copyrighted, and the process of manufacture under patent, he can put the whole thing out in plain English and people still won't be able to do it, without the Envoy training and a LOT of practice."

"Yep. And would you like to bet on the way he'd license it? I wouldn't," Muriel said. "I see two ways this could go. He could keep it proprietary and make Enclave rich. Or he could open it up for others to use, free, as long as they return any changes and improvements to the general pool and insist that their contribution be licensed the same way."

"But, wait a minute! If he gives it away like that, companies would just take it and do what they want, and not give anything back!"

"Oh, maybe some would try. But then they wouldn't have a license to use the patented process. So, he'd be within his rights to shut the company down unless and until they complied with the license requirements," Muriel said.

"So, in other words," said Alice, "the companies would be faced with going bankrupt because they can't compete, getting shut down and maybe sued because they don't comply, or playing by his rules. That's wicked. But how would the companies make any money?"

"Simple. The processes are free. But the vehicles needn't be. After all, employees have to be paid, buildings have to be leased or bought, medical expenses have to be allowed for. Jeff wouldn't be giving away cars – he'd simply be supplying the process to make them cheaper, cleaner, more efficient, and safer," Muriel said.

"I can see where you're going to be busy training people," Alice said.

"Not necessarily. What happened with the Secret Service. Or the FBI. Or the Navy and Coast Guard and Marine Corps. Or even the Air Force and Army. Train a few, and they train the rest. All I have to do is pass out passports and congratulations. And the same thing is happening with the training. Improvements or changes in the way to do things are passed back to the general pool, and everybody benefits."

"All right. I guess I understand. Anyway, I've got to find someone that can create the patent applications for this," said Alice.

"How about you? Is it really that much more than the education that you already have?" asked Muriel. "The full law degree would take about two days to open up. And that's at the doctorate level. Betty can probably give you that portion of it that you need, and have it open up in about ten or fifteen minutes. That's if you'd be interested in having that portion of it."

"Wait a minute! Are you telling me that I can get a complete law education in two days?"

"Oh, no," said Muriel, casually. "Nothing like that. It takes about five minutes to get it. But it takes about two days to open up inside your mind. Oh, and you get a diploma with it, once it's opened up and you've tested it. We just can't admit you to the Bar, since that's a local thing. Home doesn't have judges and trials and such, so no Bar association. But trust me, you'd pass that, too."

"Would I be able to use the knowledge and experience I already have?"

"I should think so. Oh, you mean while it's opening up? Good question. Let me get Betty in here and see what she says," Muriel said.

"I heard," Betty said, dryly. "That one rattled the windows in the office." Then she grinned, "Just kidding. Seriously, you should be able to use the knowledge and information you already have. There could be glitches, though if what we give you conflicts with what you know or think you know. They'd show up as it unfolded. It could be a bit uncomfortable for you."

"So, I could keep working on something that I hadn't had before while the rest opened up and sorted itself out?" asked Alice.

"Oh, ho! I see where this is going. Yes, I could give you the patent section and it would be opened up by the time you got back from lunch. So, say I give you the rest right after lunch, you could work on patents, no problem. And the rest would open up over the next couple of days," Betty said.

"Good, because it's going to take me a couple of days to go through these drawings and make patent applications for all of it," Alice said. "And copyrights are easy. Fifteen minutes and they should be done. So, give me the patent section, and I'll take an early lunch. There's a place I've wanted to try, but during normal lunch time they're crowded and I couldn't get in," she said, with a grin. Betty smiled back as she dumped the patent information into Alice.

"So, let's go to lunch," Muriel said. "I just bet there'll be room for you, today," she added, and grinned, evilly. "I've yet to find a restaurant in Enclave that had the guts to tell me that they didn't have room for me and whoever I brought with me."

Muriel was right. The restaurant manager was quite happy to have her and her party, and opened the doors early to accommodate them. Meanwhile, Jeff had just finished putting stripes on a rather groggy looking Al, and Don was congratulating them both. Jeff for having managed the training without a hitch, and Al for being the latest Citizen of Home. And Mata was putting the finishing touches on Muriel's afternoon – setting up visits to the Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Barracks in Washington to hand out passports.

“OK,” Mata said, as Muriel came back to her office, “Navy and Coast Guard will be at the Pentagon. They translated in special for this. The Marine Corps is at 'Eighth and I', whatever that is. There's about two hundred of each, so if we take your friends and their squads, and your four squads, we should be able to do this fairly quickly.”

“Well, 'Eighth and I' is the Marine Corps Barracks in Washington. And Jeff may be busy, and Fran's a doctor. They may not be able to come with us,” Muriel said.

“I already talked to them. Jeff put the car away – well, the head of maintenance did at his request, anyway. And Al went back to the company. Fran said that it's a slow day and checked with Mark. He's happy to cover for her. He said he's getting bored because she's taking so much of his work.” Mata grinned. “It seems that she's just as sensitive to problems as he is, and just as quick at locating where they are. And most of the problems are kids with upset stomachs or heat stroke. And kids respond better to her. Parents do, too, once they get over the shock of a twelve year old doctor.”

“So, you're saying that both of them are available?” Muriel asked.

“More than that. They'd be happy to help out.”

“Then I need to talk to Ted. Hold on,” Muriel said.

::Ted . . . ::

::Yes, you can.::

::What?:: asked Muriel.

::You were going to ask me if you could let your friends apply the logo, solo. Yes, you can. They're Ambassadors, and I trust them. So, go ahead and let them do it,:: he replied.

“Whoosh! I just got put in my place. He says I can. It's almost like he was expecting this for some time,” Muriel said to Mata.

“He was. Actually, he was surprised that you'd left it this long.”

“Why didn't he say something?”

“Because he figured that you'd come to the decision, yourself, when you felt pressed. And you did.”

“Sheesh! Everybody knows me except me!”

“Yea, that's about right,” Mata said, and grinned. “So, go get with your friends while I gather our troops. Then we can plan how we'll make our spectacular and outlandish entrance.”

Muriel turned around, and was facing a line of grinning kids, backed by every Envoy they had. And even the Envoys were grinning. "All right, you lot, give me room to get out the door, will you?" She said, and left the building. "Gather 'round." A few minutes later, they were all lined up, and Mata passed Muriel the coordinates.

# Chapter 24

## A Surprise Around Every Corner (Monday afternoon)

“Sir? I think they're going to be late.”

“Patience, Captain. Ambassadors can be busy people. Sometimes it's not possible to keep to a schedule . . . what's everyone pointing to?” the Admiral asked.

“Something in the sky. Isn't this a 'no fly' zone?”

“Hmm. Yes. But I don't think that applies to Ambassadors that can fly without a plane.”

In the air behind them and about one hundred feet up was a strange formation of . . . people. In the front was Muriel, followed by her twelve friends in line across, all dressed in their formal wear. Behind them was Mata, followed by twelve other security chiefs, in Class 'A' uniforms. And behind them, in one massive line, were the security squads in utility uniforms with 'Security' triangles on their shoulders.

Muriel dropped down to meet the Admiral just as the Commandant of the Coast Guard joined them. And overhead, the sky went crazy. Muriel's friends and all the Envoys went into an elaborate display of aerial maneuvers that seemed doomed to cause a collision, and ended up with them spread across the front of the two formations. The Envoys were about ten feet above the heads of the massed military, and her friends followed, ten feet above them, and they moved slowly back to the back of the military formations. At that point, the Envoys and friends broke, and reformed behind Muriel and the commanders in much the same way that they'd flown in.

“O-K! I wasn't expecting that,” Muriel said. “And people call ME outrageous. However, it's done. So now it's time for me to make my announcement,” she added to the commanders.

**Ladies and gentlemen**, she sent, in a voice that sounded audible as well as in their minds. **My name is Muriel, and I'm an Ambassador from Home to the people of America. My friends and the massed Envoys have delivered your Home passports . . . if you'd look in your 'no pockets . . . . These show that you are Citizens of Home. This is an honorary citizenship bestowed on any humans that manage to go to Home and back under their own power. But they carry perks with them. You are each welcome to visit Home whenever you wish. You are also welcome in Enclave, and will be considered guests whenever you arrive. That means that food, shelter, medical attention, and just about anything you can think of is free. You are also welcome to take any college courses you choose, free of course, from the University of Home. These are full doctor of philosophy degree programs, and in some cases come with licenses for the particular discipline. So, congratulations on your achievements.**

The massed Envoys and her friends broke out in cheers and applause, and were quickly matched and surpassed by the men and women in the military formations. And, in short order, after congratulating the Admiral and Commandant on the accomplishment, it was time to go to the Marines. The kids and Envoys performed the same aerial ballet, capturing the attention of the assembled troops, while Muriel distracted the Commandant. Then, the same speech and congratulations were performed, followed by the cheers and applause.

The difference came at the end, when Muriel suggested that they all go back to the offices. Mata thought it might be a good idea to contact Paul, and see how he was doing. So Muriel did, and discovered that Paul was in the middle of an argument with the heads of some of the major colleges about accreditation. Worse still, the President had been roped into the argument. And that's how Muriel and Mata with one squad and Don with his squad ended up in the President's office.

"Good afternoon, Mr. President," Muriel said as they arrived. "I understand that you have a bit of a problem?"

"You might say that. These gentlemen seem to feel that they have a right to continue making money from the same tired method of instruction that they've been using for the past two hundred years or so."

"Buggy whips," Muriel said.

"What?" asked one of the men. "What does that have to do with the fact that you have some sub-standard method of teaching that you've managed to hoodwink the Secretary of Education into accrediting?"

"Buggy whips. When cars were invented and became popular and numerous the manufacturers of buggy whips complained because they were no longer making as much money. Instead of finding other things to make they tried to get protection for their businesses on the grounds that they were an essential industry. The only ones left. now, make ornamental ones or the few used for people that actually have buggies for parades and such," Muriel said. "Your methods are outdated. Oh, and so is much of what you teach. So, you're in here making pests of yourselves trying to insist that your way is better. I bet you screamed just as loud when people discovered that they no longer had to go live at some expensive school to get an education. They could take the courses in their spare time over the Internet and still go to work and earn money."

"Little girl, you don't understand the complexity of the situation, or the depth of the education you get in a traditional educational environment," the man said.

"Oh, oh," Mata said just loud enough to be heard. "He used the 'little girl' phrase. NOW we're in trouble. I hope the roof on this building is nailed down tight." Muriel turned to Mata and smiled.

"My turn, Muriel," Don said. "You can't have all the fun. Now then, mister, how long



has your ignominious version of education been going on?

“What? What is this! I will not be questioned by children!”

“Very well, I'll tell you, instead,” Don said. “You can go look it up for yourself on your own time. The first university was Al-Azhar in Cairo, Egypt. That was 975 AD. Now, I could go through and catalog all the various other ones throughout Europe and the United States, but it's pointless. The fact that your style of teaching goes back that far should tell you that it's time for a change. Oh, sure, there's been visual aids and such tacked onto the basic structure, but that's something like putting a tutu on a pig. It's still a pig.” By this time the President was chuckling, and Paul's mouth had dropped open.

“Now, if you had the basic training I could feed you all this in about five minutes. The whole history of the West. But, since you're too closed minded to even attempt it I'll have to give you a small bit of it the old fashioned way. One of the oldest in America was William and Mary, founded in sixteen ninety three,” he said, and a highly detailed terrain opened up in front of him and buildings were constructed and roads built.

“This, like Harvard and Yale, was modeled after the major universities of England at the time,” Don went on, the scene fast-forwarding through what looked like a time laps of events over the years. “Because of lack of rapid communication and large – for them – distances involved, the education offered was out of date to begin with. Over time, humans in America overcame the problems of distance and communication. But the methods survived because the publishers of the text books either didn't bother changing their texts, or the universities, themselves, resisted any change. I'll let you decide which it was in your case. The point remains that your education is out of date. Your methods are out of date. And your services are way too expensive. Why should such a situation continue to be accredited?”

“Would you like us to track your expenses and income for the past ten years?” Mata asked. “We have the capability of doing it. We can even track whether or not your students were considered qualified for employment in their chosen professions. How many of them got jobs, and how many of them ended up doing minimum wage jobs for their expensive degrees. We don't do that. Anyone that can make a mental link can get a degree at a reasonable cost, and those that take the Envoy training can get it for free. Oh, and that includes food, clothing and shelter, as necessary. All for less than you charge for tuition for one semester. I don't think you'd like the results to be made public.”

“This is outrageous,” another of them said. “We're supposed to listen to the rantings of children who have no idea what they're talking about?”

“Careful,” Paul said. “The young man, over there, has at least one PhD in History. Another in Education. And teaches history at some of the local schools on a rotating basis, using Envoy techniques such as you saw to get the information across. More than that, he relates the information to the times that they occurred in. He helps the kids make connections. And these are kids that can't or aren't allowed to make the mental link. The young girl, on the other hand, I have no idea how many degrees she has right now. She wouldn't tell me. But I know for fact that she understands copyrights and patents, as well as

business management. She's an Ambassador, a trainer of Envoy techniques, the head of a holding company that owns six companies outright, and a heck of a strategist. Don't sell them short because they're young. These kids, and others like them, have more than proven themselves. I'm half tempted, based on this baseless and blatant attempt to keep them from being accredited, to pull your accreditation. Instead of having the time to find out how to reduce your costs and actually teach people something, you could find yourself out of a job."

"Mr. President, I must protest!"

"Denied," the President said. "I've seen what just one of Muriel's friends did in five minutes. She saved the life of a man, healed his heart, cleaned out his arteries, and strengthened his body. And this was a man that regular medical science had given up on. Nope. You're done. Get out of my office and quit crying. Oh, and if you try to stir up the public against Enclave and the University of Home I'll see that Mata is turned loose to provide the information she said she could get. And publish it. And when that happens I'll ask the Secretary of Education to remove your accreditation. You will no longer be authorized to offer ANY degree. Is that understood? We're giving you an opportunity to change."

"Change, or die, people. Either change your ways or watch all you've worked for go right down the drain," Muriel said in her quiet voice. "You're buggy whip makers in a time of cars. Change, or die. We're here to help you, if you like. We have no animosity toward you. We just won't be bullied by idiots that fail to see that their finances are in their own hands. Change, or die, people. It makes no difference to us. Your judgment will be your own."

"And now, gentlemen," the President said, "you are excused. Melanie, would you see that these people are shown the way out, please?" Two Secret Service officers entered and escorted the University heads out.

As they left, Mata quietly pulled a CD out of a 'no pocket' and handed it to the President. "I didn't have the heart to tell them that the research had already been done. Betty, the head of the education squad, had been working on this for the past week. She finished it just before we came. I thought it might be useful."

"And you just happened to have it with you," he said, chuckling. "Muriel, your people are amazing. And you, young man. I don't think we've been properly introduced."

"I'm Don. Trainer, troublemaker and bat boy," Don said with a grin.

"The first two I can attest to," the President said. "But why 'bat boy'?"

"I started out testing shields on the newly trained by trying to hit them with a baseball bat." The President roared with laughter.

"So, that's where Melanie got the idea," he finally said, when he'd finally stopped laughing. "She had one of her squad do that with me. She said something about it being quieter than being shot with a 45 caliber gun."

"That would be my fault," Mata said. "When Muriel was trained, that's exactly what we did. One squad pulled out guns and shot her from ten feet away. Never even rocked her. THEN the minx went on to explain that her shield was different from what we'd taught her. She ended up teaching us!"

"But . . . what if her shield hadn't held?" asked the President.

"Then she might have been knocked over. I was backstopping her. She wouldn't have been hurt beyond bumps and bruises. We don't believe in wasting trainees," Mata replied. "We also don't believe in failure. If somebody doesn't get it the first time, we find ways to help them understand and correct as necessary. Muriel's the same way."

"Yes, so is Melanie," he said with a smile. "She was extremely patient with me. Now, Muriel, what do you think will happen?"

"I think they'll be stupid. They think that, because they were getting all that money for so long, that they are entitled to it. Probably something 'testing the waters', like 'who are these Envoys and why should their University be accredited?' That would be the time to disclose the information, publicly," Mata said. "That would show where the money for education has actually been going. Oh, and Betty is doing another search of textbooks, showing how little is actually updated from one version to another, and how often critical changes are made. And I think she's right. I think the publishers will be next. We've shown that their golden eggs that students have been forced to buy are nothing but painted paper mache. They're not going to like being shown that way, and their argument is that 'it's traditional'. Now THERE'S a dirty word if I ever heard one."

"Wait a minute! How do you know that there's so few changes between editions of a textbook?"

"Simple. There's a big market in used textbooks in colleges. Besides, do you know how the books are selected? A salesman comes around and 'suggests' that the instructors purchase them. Salesman – who knows nothing of the subject matter, but touts the book as the defining text on the subject. And in some cases it isn't even the instructor that OK's the purchase. It's some department in the college that knows even less about the subject than the salesman does."

"I think I need to change the subject. I'm only getting depressed about American business. Muriel," he immediately said, forestalling any attempt by others to add something more about universities or business, "what are you doing Friday evening? We're hosting a party, here, and would like you to attend."

"Well . . . I don't know, sir. I'd have to ask my mother if I could stay up that late. And would I be properly chaperoned? I mean by somebody that's responsible?" Muriel replied, innocently. Meanwhile, Paul's face was undergoing the most interesting spasms and contortions, starting with hopeful and ending with a vain attempt to keep from laughing. He'd even covered his face with his hand, hoping that the expressive seizure wouldn't be noticed.

"Hmm," said the President, "now that's a good question. It couldn't be me as a responsible adult. After all, the people elected me President. And Paul's disqualified because he sought you out for information, so he's shown that he's not responsible. Melanie? Nope. She works for me, so she's got a conflict of interest." By this time Paul was sitting down, holding his face with one hand and his stomach with the other, and shaking all over. "I know!" the President said. "It's your fault. That makes you responsible, so you can chaperon yourself." And that did it. Paul burst into laughter, and the rest of the group joined in.

When they all calmed down a bit, Muriel asked, "So, where, when, and how outrageous do you want me to be?"

"Friday evening at seven o'clock," the President said, still chuckling, "in the Diplomatic Reception room, and you can just be yourself. I'm sure that'll be outrageous enough. Oh, and how come you were all fancied up when we called you in?"

"Oh, I'd just finished up at Eighth and I. Two hundred Marines to give passports to. And before that about two hundred each of Navy and Coast Guard at the Pentagon," Muriel said. "I was just about to go back to my office when I contacted Paul. Now I'm glad I did. It was fun shooting those old fogies down, even if it won't stick."

"Oh, it'll stick," the President said. "We may have to hammer it down a bit, but it'll stick. I never realized just how bad our educational system was until I heard about some of this from Paul. Too bad there isn't an international standard for education. We already know we lag behind some other countries, like Japan, in our ability to turn out qualified people. Then to find out that we burden students and parents with a horrific bill, and the students come out not qualified to hold down a job in their field and are relegated to minimum wage to try to pay off that debt. That's a waste of good people."

"Well, I'd better get back and 'advise' Ted of where I'll be Friday night. I wouldn't want him to get worried."

"Bring him, if you like. Just let me know and we'll have a place set for him at the kiddies table. Beside you," he said, and grinned.

"Oh! Is that what they call the head table, now?" Muriel responded.

"Will you be bringing guards?" he asked, dodging the barb.

"Probably one squad. And Mata, of course. If Ted comes, he'll probably bring a squad and Bart. They can always stand around the walls and look pretty. Or intimidating, as the case may be. That's if Melanie doesn't mind their being there."

"No problem," Melanie said. "They won't be in the way. And since they aren't armed there shouldn't be a problem with the guests."

"OK, then. I'll pass the word to Ted, and see what he wants to do. I'll let you know through Melanie, so I don't disturb your nap," Muriel said, and she, Mata and Don quickly

disappeared.

“Disturb my nap, indeed. Sometimes I wish that I could get one,” the President muttered. “Well, back to it, troops. What’s up next?”

# Chapter 25

## International Relations (Friday evening)

"I think I know why the President wanted us here," Ted said as they approached the Diplomatic Reception room in the White House. "I'd heard that the Prince and his family had come over."

"So, you think he's showing us off like prize dogs?" Muriel asked.

"Well, if that's the case, I hope he doesn't mind that you're not trained."

"Why, Ted! I'll have you know I can hit the paper every time." Ted just snorted. "I should know better than to try to get you. You're slipperier than a greased pig that's heard there's going to be ham for dinner."

"I have other outstanding qualities, too," she said. "And just as soon as I figure out what they are, I'll let you know."

"Well, ready to charge the crowd?"

"Why? Are they buying something from us? Or are they all criminals?"

"Well, as to that, we can hope the former but expect the latter," Ted said.

"You go ahead. When I asked the President how outrageous I should be, he said I should just be myself. So you and the squads go on in, then I'll make my entrance."

"Oh, oh. That sounds ominous. However, if that's what you want." And he headed for the doorway.

"Ambassador from Home and co-leader of Home, Ted," a functionary announced.

Muriel sidled over to the functionary and whispered to him. He looked down at her with a stern face, then broke into a smile. "I can do that, Miss. And I'm going to enjoy it, too. I've heard about you."

Muriel was out of sight of the door when he announced, "The Outrageous Ambassador from Home and co-leader of Home, Muriel."

On her cue, she translated to a spot inside the door but above the crowd and glowed. As the crowd gasped, she calmly walked down to the floor level, noting three things as she went. The first was the President looking at her and laughing. The second was Ted covering his eyes and shaking his head. And the third was a young man staring at her with his mouth

open, standing near the President. Figuring this was the best direction to head, she walked toward the President and him.

“Mr. President. I hope that was outrageous enough for you,” she grinned at him.

“I think that will do quite adequately, Muriel. And you're the only one I know of that could have pulled that off with such flair and elan. And may I present the Royal Family?” He did, including the still gawking young man.

“Oh, dear,” the Prince said. “This isn't in the book of protocols. How is one supposed to address you?”

“Muriel seems to work just fine. We only drag out the titles to intimidate the bullies, your Highness.”

“Oh, now who's dragging out titles. Very well, Muriel it is. And this is our son, Taylor. Son, at least shake her hand.”

The boy's mouth snapped shut, then he stammered, “Sorry. I've just never seen anything like that.”

“Taylor, huh? Well, sir, I think that you and I should go over to that corner of this oval room and have a little talk. If you'll excuse us, Mr. President, Your Highness,” Muriel said, and led the boy off to a pair of unoccupied chairs.

“Sit. Now, Taylor, what is it?”

“You . . . I mean . . . um . . . .”

“Come on, Taylor. I'm not going to bite you. And I won't take offense. So?” she asked.

“You . . . when you appeared, I thought I heard a giggle and somehow I knew it came from you. Then, your walking in the air, and the glow,” he finally got out.

“OK, I see what the problem is. First, I'm human. Really. Next, the glow – it's a trick that those with Envoy training can do. And finally, the giggle. I think I know what happened. And yes, I did giggle to myself. The President asked me to be my outrageous self, and it seemed like a good idea at the time, and that sort of stuff is fun. And now, I think I need to talk to your parents a bit. WITH you. Not behind your back. So, let's see how we can arrange this.”

::Melanie, is there some way I can get the Prince and Princess alone with their son for about ten minutes?::

::Let me check, Muriel.:: After a moment she came back, ::OK, the President suggests you use his office. I'll have to be there with you. Will that be a problem?::

::No problem, and maybe a bit of calming effect. We've got a boy that's picking up thoughts from others. I need to speak to his parents about getting him trained.::

::OH! OK, I'm going to have the table rearranged a bit, then, too. That way you can sit next to him and shield him.::

::Good thought, Melanie. OK, I'm going to head toward the door with him. Get his parents outside, and we'll translate directly there.::

"I heard that," Taylor said. "Only, I'm not supposed to hear things like that. Who's Melanie?"

"Melanie is the head of the President's Detail of the Secret Service. And there go your parents. Let's get out the doorway and I'll give you a better idea of what's going on in a minute." As they moved toward the door Muriel sent, ::Ted, cover for me. I need to talk to the Prince and Princess privately for about ten minutes. Possible trainee.::

::Got it. You're covered. Mata's coming, too,:: he sent back. They rounded the corner to where Melanie was standing with Taylor's parents, and the six of them translated to the Oval Office.

"I'm sorry to pull you away, but we've got a situation that can be helped. But we need your permission. Your son can hear thoughts from other people. It may also mean that he leaks thoughts which could be diplomatically problematic. I want to teach him how to make real contact, then teach him how to shield thoughts both ways," Muriel said. "It's not full Envoy training, but it is a small part of it. Later, I suggest that he have the full training, for his own protection."

"I'm beginning to see why you're so outrageous at times. It covers for the fact that you're very direct. All right, you have our permission, if he's willing. Son?" the Prince asked.

"You mean there's a way to stop this? YES! I agree," Taylor said.

"OK, Taylor, just relax. This may hurt a little, because you'll be using mental muscles that aren't really trained, yet. I'll fix it as soon as it shows up. Now, just look at me . . .," and she went into the knock-knock routine. Taylor's face lit up like a neon sign on a dark night.

Then, after a couple of minutes, he said, "The pressure's gone. I don't feel like I'm hearing everyone, anymore."

"Good," Muriel said. "Then we should be able to go back in. Dinner should be soon, and I understand that Melanie has seen to the rearrangement of the seating so I'll be next to you. That way I can help shield you from stray thoughts. I've added a trickle of power so the headache shouldn't recur, even if we talk mentally during dinner.

They sauntered back into the room after translating to the area out of sight of the



doorway. Dinner went off about how Muriel expected it to. The meal wasn't bad, though. The various speeches she could have done without. And she noticed that Taylor would look at her as they talked mentally, which probably meant that someone would be touting to the press how the young Prince had a thing for Muriel. *Oh, well*, she thought, *I've dealt with worse rumors*. When the party finally broke up, their Royal Highnesses lagged behind, along with Ted and Muriel, and the President.

"OK, young lady, 'fess up," the President said.

"Simple. Taylor was picking up thoughts from anyone that was near. The pressure was starting to get to him. So I had him make contact with me, mentally, then taught him how to shield against that, and how to keep from leaking, himself."

"So, now you want to train him?" asked Ted.

"What I want has nothing to do with it. It's up to him and his parents. All I can do is tell them what it entails, and what it offers, and let them make the decision," Muriel said. "Oh, and the phenomenal cost for the training, room, board, clothing and protection. As well as the loan of an Envoy during part of the training."

"Um, I don't suppose you'd consider a discount, would you? After all, we're merely going to be heads of state someday – maybe. You already are one," the Prince said.

"Well . . . for you, and of course this is a one-time offer, I suppose we could cut the cost in half. Ted? What's half of free?" And she grinned. "Seriously, we don't charge for the Envoy training. And we only charge those that haven't taken the Envoy training for college courses."

"Yep. You're outrageous. But I think I like the way you're outrageous. So, what would it entail?"

"We take him back to Enclave with us and put him up in the Guest House. Hot and cold running Envoys to take care of his needs and meals. We can make it a suite, so you can send a guard or two along with him. Then, tomorrow, the fun begins. First he'll learn to connect to power, so he's got something to work with other than his own resources. Then shields, which I think he'll have fun with. Next is clothing and the reason I'll need a male Envoy to help him. I have no interest in watching him take his clothes off." This brought a delightful blush to Taylor's face.

"So, after he's learned how to make his own clothes there's getting around from place to place without all that petty stuff of having to pass through all the points in between. We just call it translating. Here on earth it's been called teleportation. And finally the trip to Home and back, and his stripes and passport showing that he's a Citizen of Home. It's an honorary thing and doesn't mean that he's obligated to Home in any way," she added. "After that, it's mostly practice and finding out what he wants to do with it. Like Melanie turned the lights on in the Oval Office from here. Same with turning them off. She also trained the President and his Chief of Staff. Or catching him up with his school work – even getting him ahead of his

age group. Oh, and air hockey. My friends would have fun teaching him how to play that.”

“Oh, we have an air hockey table. He's never shown much interest in it,” the Princess said.

“This is different. Fifty to one hundred feet in the air and about one hundred fifty miles per hour, over a field about the size of a football field,” Muriel said, then turned to Taylor. “An application of that is how I entered the room.”

“What about injuries,” Taylor's father asked.

“Shields. Trust me, NOTHING gets through them unless you want it to,” she said, stepping away from them. “Melanie?” And Melanie pulled out a baseball bat and aimed for her head. The bat stopped a foot from her body. “I've been shot at, more than once, had tanks fire at me, had a chain bomb wrapped around me. Nothing got through. It didn't even muss my hair,” she said, dramatically patting at a coiffure that wasn't there. “Oh, speaking of injuries, there is one other part of the basic training. Those that pass the basic training get a 'battlefield first aid' course. A trainee with that, well, if there's a near fatal injury and the trainee can get to them before they die, they can end up walking away, whole. The only reason it isn't a full blown doctor's course is that it only really covers injuries and the like. Not illnesses.”

“Taylor?” asked his mother.

“I'd like to,” he replied, “if it's all right with you.”

“How long,” asked the Prince.

“Oh, I'm sorry. I should have said. We've had it take as long as four days and as short as a half a day. I don't recommend the latter as some of it needs practice, like translating from one place to another. Also, the 'battlefield first aid' course takes a couple of days to unfold into a person's mind before it can be used. Plus, the extra things that might be individual specific would take longer. I'd say, for your son, no longer than four days.”

“Your Highness,” Ted said, “You are as welcome as he is to come and stay at Enclave, and see how it's done. Or even just to visit him while he's in training. And the only one that might be better than Muriel at training is a friend of hers. Don. And she trained him. In fact, Muriel was the first trainee, and she ended up training the Envoys as well as her friends and a number of others. She's good, and she doesn't give up. It's more than just not believing in failure. She actively believes in success. And it's infectious – everyone that she's trained has turned out the same way.”

“Dear?” the Prince asked his wife.

“We'd have to cancel the next one. Maybe two.”

“Let me make a phone call, then.” The Prince turned away, and spoke for a few

minutes.

While he did, the Princess turned to her son, "You wouldn't mind if we came along, would you?"

"As long as you don't get in the way, or try to tell them how to do it. You saw Muriel in action. She had me straightened out in just a couple of minutes," he said.

"Meaning that if we try to tell them what to do or how to do it, it could just make it take longer. You know, Tay, I think that's the strongest you've spoken to us. I think you really want this."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Oh, stop! You've called me mum for years. There's no reason to stop now. And these are friends, not public," she said. "Or . . . wait a minute. You just reinforced your desire, didn't you? Never mind. It'll be done. Though an illness on your part may be the excuse he uses to cancel those two visits or put them off until later."

"That's reasonable. After all, it is because of me. And an illness makes a plausible excuse," Taylor said. "And I get the feeling that you'd like to take the training, yourselves."

"OK, it's all set. Sorry it took so long. I'd really like to make the visit to those places, so it was a matter of setting it up for another time. I did mention that it was because you were sick, Tay," said the Prince.

"That's OK. Perfectly acceptable excuse, considering the situation, dad. And in a sense, I HAVE been ill. The constant voices and headaches. And I'd really like to get the rest of the training. Maybe it would help me become more me," Taylor said.

"Good lad," the Prince said with a smile. "Go for the fix, then go for the way to control it. Um," he said, turning to Muriel, "I suppose that we're too old to take the training."

"If so, I can't think of any reason why. And don't let my parents hear you say that. They were the ones that took four days," Muriel said. "So, if we're ready?" And they and their guards translated to the front desk of Guest House.

# Chapter 26

## Theory of Relativity: It's All Relatives (Saturday morning)

Getting the Royal Family settled in Guest House was, as usual, very easily done. Taylor got one suite to himself and his guards. His parents got a larger one for them and half their guards plus a third one for the rest of the guards. Muriel assured them that they'd be met in the morning and left them to the tender care of the Guest House Envoys.

At eight o'clock Saturday morning Muriel gathered up Mata, Don and Bobby, and Ted to help her with what she expected to be a bit touchy training situation. After all, at this point she had no idea if Taylor's parents could even make a mental link. On the other hand, she wasn't worried about Taylor. That he wanted an end to what had become an unbearable situation – constantly being subjected to the thoughts of people around him – assured her that he'd go the course even if she had to find other ways of getting the method across to him. No, it was his parents that she worried about, and she was torn between trying to train them herself and allowing somebody else to train them.

For once, Ted took the decision out of her hands. He was more used to the intricacies of dealing with heads of state than she was, and requested the loan of Mata while he visited the parents. Don and Bobby went with her to Taylor's room. A very relieved Taylor's room. He was, in fact, standing outside the door rocking from one foot to another while a very serious man in military uniform stood behind him.

"You came!"

"Of course I did. And I brought friends. Now, before we start, what do YOU prefer me to call you?" asked Muriel.

"Oh! Taylor. My parents call me Tay but I really don't like it."

"Good. Taylor, this is Don and Bobby. Don is a trainer, and he and I can trade off working with you, especially when it comes to you making your own clothes. Bobby is another friend who happens to be sensitive to people with problems. Sometimes I have difficulty getting ideas across to trainees, and Bobby thought that maybe he'd be able to smooth some of that over. Do you mind their being here?"

"No, that's fine. Whatever it takes," Taylor responded. "Oh, this is my bodyguard. Well, the one for during the day, anyway. One of three. They trade off between them."

Bobby walked over to the guard and looked up at him. "I can help," he said. "And yes, you can. Are the others like you?"

The man looked back and forth between Muriel and Bobby, then finally looked at

Taylor. "It's all right, Sid. You can talk to them."

At that point Sid immediately came alert, looking down the hall. An Envoy was approaching wearing the Envoy version of the Class 'A' uniform that Muriel and her friends sported. As he approached, Sid slid in front of Taylor.

"Muriel! My name is Saul. Mata asked if I'd mind helping out. Actually I was overjoyed at her request. She thought, if Taylor and I could hit it off, that I should go with him. I can provide some of the additional training as well as any courses he needs."

"Sid," Bobby said, "Do you trust Muriel?" The guard nodded. "Muriel, put a shield around Taylor. A non-sticky one." When she had, Bobby turned back to Sid. "Test it, Sid. Hit it." He first touched it, then hit it, causing his knuckles to bleed. "She'll guard him, Sid. You and I need to do some work, then you'll understand why Muriel wasn't upset by a stranger coming up. Let me see your hand. Come on. You won't do your best if you're distracted. There. That's better. Pain's all gone and skin healed. Even the bone bruise has been reduced and shouldn't bother you. Now . . .," Bobby started, going into the knock-knock routine. Minutes later Sid was actually smiling at Bobby.

"Just a little longer, Muriel. I'm going to show him how to see souls," Bobby said.

Two minutes later Sid turned to Saul and said, "Sir, I apologize."

"No need to apologize, Sid. And it's just Saul. You have every right to be suspicious of people approaching your charge. That's your job."

"Well," said Sid with a somewhat gravelly voice, "Let's get in out of the hall, then, where people can work without distraction." Muriel released the shield and Sid guided Taylor through the door. The rest followed.

"OK," said Muriel, re-establishing control, "Bobby, I take it that you want to work with Sid?" At his nod, Muriel went on, "Don, I'm going to ask you to work with Taylor, if you would. I think you and he might work better together than he and I, right now. Saul, can I talk to you for a moment?" And she indicated a space some distance from the others.

"OK, that was a dodge," Muriel said.

"I know. And well done, too," he said quietly. "Sid leaks like a sieve. He must have sparked the ability in Taylor without either of them realizing it. And that was your hunch, wasn't it? That somebody around him, and probably a guard, had started his talent blooming?"

"Yep. That's why I brought Bobby. And he homed in on him like a piece of steel to a magnet."

"He may not be the only one," Saul said. "Oh, when you talked about school, last night, Taylor glitched. Mata caught it, and put in a call last night. I've been working in Home

on putting together various courses of study. We've got it refined down, now, to where the opening time is less. I can have him through high school, or whatever they call it over there, before they get home. I can also add courses to help him with his confidence. And I know all the tricks that you and the others have come up with. Basically, Mata assigned me to be his tutor and Security Chief for an eventual squad of his own."

"That was nice of her," Muriel said, dryly.

"Oh, nothing like that, and I won't take away from his guards. And it all depends on whether or not Taylor and I can get along," Saul said. "But it would give him a leg up in school, where he's struggling. And I can get the confidence building in almost without his knowing, if he'll let me tutor him."

"OK, well Sid is standing up taller, and Taylor is grinning like he was trying to make his head split. Oh, and Don has his baseball bat out. So, I think it's time to go a step further," Muriel said. "Guys, this is where I have to leave you for a while. Saul, can you help them with getting them dressed?"

"No problem. Sid, can I work with you, and leave the boys to work with Taylor?" he asked.

"Can I ask why?"

"Of course. I'm an Envoy, which means that I can pretty much assume any way of looking. So I can come close to your size and shape, and what you're wearing so you can see it. Muriel, git. Leave this to us men." Muriel got. And, from what she heard afterward, the men had as much fun as the girls had when they were being trained. Fifteen minutes later, she was called back, and they looked like they'd just put on custom fit clothing, brand new, and with very shiny shoes and boots, and were laughing. Even somewhat dour Bobby was grinning.

"Muriel," Bobby said, "where are we going to have them go? They don't know any place, here in Enclave. All they really know is around their home area."

"Right off hand, Bobby, I can think of three solutions," Muriel said. "We can all go take a walk around Enclave, or we can translate them to different places, ourselves, and let them become familiar with them, or we can just go ask the manager, here, what he thinks."

"And a fourth," said Don, "is to go ask at Reception. Same reason as the manager. They both are used to helping guests and visitors figure out where they want to go, and probably have good images of all the popular places in Enclave. They may even have good images of less popular places, where there'd be less chance of congestion."

"All right! How'd you two come up with all of that?" asked Taylor.

"There's an old saying," Muriel said, "that each problem suggests a solution. The saying is wrong, by the way, but it's wrong because it makes assumptions. The problem with

the statement is that it assumes that the problem falls within the range of connections that the individual has. And, I'd also be willing to bet that the easiest solution is about to find us."

"What? What do you mean?" asked Bobby, just as there was a knock at the door.

"Right off hand, I'd say that my deep link to Mata, and her organizational skills, suggested possible solutions to her before we even started," Muriel said, as she laughed and opened the door for Mata to come in.

"I think that's cheating," Bobby said, and Mata laughed.

"I've got four places that are within walking distance that won't be crowded at this time of day," Mata said. "And we can just walk them around to the places and let them get familiar with them, then turn them loose to translate to them, one at a time. The first and most obvious is their rooms, here. The second is the front desk, downstairs. The third is the offices of the Ambassadors, and the fourth is the front desk of the lawyers offices. And yes, I've alerted Susan that we'll be popping in and out."

"I still think that's cheating," Bobby said. "But, since you went to all the trouble, Mata, let's go for a walk."

Taylor just looked from one to another with a puzzled expression on his face. "Do you people do this sort of thing all the time?"

"If you mean goofing around, the answer is yes. If you mean finding ways through a problem, well, the answer is yes, again," Muriel said. "If you mean being willing to ask when you don't know an answer, then that's a maybe. Sometimes we can work it out for ourselves, and we rely more on that than we do on anything else. Asking – being willing to admit that we don't know everything and someone else might have an answer, or at least a better answer – that runs a close second. We're human, Taylor. We make mistakes, we make wrong choices. Most times it doesn't mean anything and things work out, anyway. Sometimes things are critical, and input from other people can help. Mata and I have been doing it since we first met."

"You missed one, Mata," said a male voice from the open doorway.

"Dad! Mom! What are you doing here?" Muriel ran to them and hugged them.

"Well, our street is residential, and usually not too busy," her mother said. "Those that are going to work have already left. Those going shopping haven't started yet. So, it's not crowded. And you still leak when you're concerned about something. Nothing serious, and nothing that most people could pick up. But it's there, and sometimes we pick it up. I'm beginning to think that we've been offering hints all your life, without realizing why. Our place isn't in walking distance, but it would be a good target for them to find from just an image. So, who are these people?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Prince Taylor and his bodyguard. Well, one of them. Taylor had a

problem, last night, at the party the President gave. I gave him a quick fix, then suggested to his parents that he take the full training," Taylor came forward as Muriel was speaking.

"So, you really are human, Muriel," he said, and her parents laughed.

"Oh, very much human, very much a girl, and very much still something of a child sometimes," her father said. "I'm pleased to meet you, sir."

"Oh, just Taylor, please. I've come to find out that there's a time and place for titles and all that nonsense. Otherwise, they just get in the way of being people." Muriel noted that he was standing up straighter and spoke with more confidence than he had before. "Besides, Muriel outranks me," he added with a grin.

"Yes," said Ted, who'd come up behind Muriel's parents with Taylor's parents. "Muriel ranks everyone."

"I am NOT rank!" Muriel exclaimed, with her hands on her hips. She then dropped her hands and looked demure and said, "I took a shower this morning. Besides, Ted, you outrank me."

"Then you haven't been listening to your Envoys," Ted said, with a grin. "I'm A leader of Home. You're THE leader of Home. I used to kid about 'if you left all the Envoys would go with you'. Now, it's no joke. And before you say it, yes, it's fair. And proper. You've done more for Home and the Envoys than I have. I gave them a purpose. You gave them a way to achieve that purpose. And now you've taken it international. And all just by being you."

"But . . . you were first!" Muriel exclaimed.

"Doesn't matter. And I'm not unhappy with the situation. You see opportunities and act on them without even knowing they're opportunities. You simply act because you care about people. And to you people are people. Not races, not nationalities, not classes, just people. The closest you come to dividing up people is when you think about what problem needs to be solved, next. You're also the one that people go to when they want information on Home, Envoys, or Enclave. Ask Mata if you don't believe me. But first, let's get these good people through the rest of their training before lunch. Then they can relax and see where they want to go from here."

Muriel had the decency to blush and look slightly confused for a moment. But it was only a moment. Then she re-prioritized her thoughts and started giving orders in her quiet, 'request' style that didn't seem like orders. And things happened. At the front desk, the Manager of Guest House had an area roped off to keep people out, so they could pop in and out without any problem. Then it was the short walk to her office, translate back to Guest House, then walk to the lawyers, and the popcorn machine started. Rooms, to lawyers, to Guest House, to her office in all sorts of combinations. Finally translating to the street in front of her parents house from just the image, then back to their rooms.

Then it was time for a break and something to nibble on and drink. They'd expended a



lot of energy in their run around Enclave, even though they all were connected to power. And their minds felt tired even if their bodies didn't. But the method was glued in their minds on how to translate safely, and they had the confidence that they could do it, even from just an image. The Guest House Envoys outdid themselves making sure that people had what they needed and wanted in the way of food, drink, and relaxation. And they grinned and congratulated them on their accomplishments, which encouraged Taylor and his parents and guard even more.

Taylor was the first to recover and make the trip to Home and back. Muriel escorted him and told him who the old Marine was that greeted her. Taylor, however, was greeted by a military figure in dress uniform that she didn't recognize. Taylor told her that he had been his first bodyguard up until recently. He'd died of old age. And he was VERY pleased to see Taylor, and proud of him. So Taylor returned to his room sobered and buoyed up by the experience.

Not to be outdone, his guard went next escorted by Don, and came back much the same way. Then it was his parents turn. Taylor's father came back very stiff and grim. His mother came back weeping, and Taylor shot out of the room and went to theirs to comfort her. It wasn't that their experience was bad, as such. Just that it had an enormous effect on them due to who they met. And they wouldn't talk about it. Later, they said. Later, when it had a chance to settle on them and they could look at it objectively.

Muriel suggested that they all come to her office when they felt ready. Then she gathered up Ted, Mata, Bobby and Don and left them alone.

# Chapter 27

## Changes

(Saturday afternoon)

"You DO understand, now, that you can train others," Muriel said when the family had gathered in her casual area. "We'll be happy to supply people to help or even just to monitor your training, if you like. And Saul can help. Being an Envoy, he can train just about as well as anyone. And I'd be happy to pass out passports, like yours, to whoever goes all the way with the training."

"Really!" The Prince said.

"Of course. The training was meant to be out there. That's why we do it for free. Ted, you tell him. I don't think he believes me," said Muriel.

"I'll go you one better, Muriel. I think that their country needs it's own Ambassador from Home to hand out the passports and set up training."

"Ted," Muriel said, "I can almost smell something coming. Give."

"Oh, nothing serious. The Prince and Princess have jobs that they need to be able to do. So . . . ."

Everyone looked at Taylor. "ME!" he squeaked, and everyone laughed.

"Why not," said Ted. "You know how to train, and you've got Saul to help you. And I just bet that the rest of your guards will be trained, shortly, so you'll have your own security force. All it takes is the authorization of the crown for you to set it up."

Taylor's father looked puzzled for a moment, then said, "I'll be right back," and translated out. It was ten minutes before he came back, but when he did he was carrying a parchment scroll. "OK, here it is. A Royal Warrant naming Taylor as Ambassador to Home and authorizing him to set up such facilities as he deems necessary . . . well, in plain English it means that he can set up his own office, recruit personnel as employees or whatever, have his own private military force subject only to him and the Crown – and yes, Taylor, that means you can create your own uniforms – and take care of training of persons within the realm. Oh, and the private military force? You can recruit from existing forces, like the Life Guards. In other words, you can transfer your current guards to your force and recruit others as you see fit."

"Wow!" said Taylor, quietly, but with emphasis.

"Oh, and son, there's something else, once you get your office set up. At least if Muriel doesn't mind. You'll be head of our extension of the University of Home. Saul has the

training material, I understand. You'd simply be the local authority. Deputy chancellor, or something."

"That sounds good to me," Muriel said. "We'll have to teach you a few things to go with it, but I don't see any real problems. Do you, Ted?"

"Nope. Basically, Taylor, you'd be setting up your own version of Enclave. In fact, I believe your current Home passport has an error in it that needs to be corrected. If I may?"

Taylor handed the passport to Ted, who looked at it for a moment then handed it back. "There," Ted said. "That's better." On the face of the green booklet was the word Diplomat, and inside was the authorization making Taylor an Ambassador from Home. "That's the second two-way Ambassador that's been named."

"Taylor," his father said, "one other thing. With Saul tutoring you, we'll pull you out of that school."

"No," Taylor interrupted. "I will leave. But I won't be driven out. There's something I need to do before I leave. Once I've done that, I'll notify the appropriate people in the school of my withdrawal. I promise, it won't be bloody. At least not physically so. Saul? How fast can I be jumped to graduating from high school?"

"Give me four days, sir, and you'll have a PhD in any field you like," he replied.

"Saul . . . just Taylor. How long would it take to set up an 'education' squad?"

"As soon as you have an office set up, I can have a squad of five in place. Your office, though, is something you should think about. With human security, you'll need barracks for them, as well as facilities for food and such. Let me think about it, some, and I may have some recommendations."

"Start with Muriel's office as a starting point, Saul," Taylor said. "Oh, not exact. Just the general idea, but reworked to suit our needs. Uniforms. Muriel, would you stand up, please?" She did. "Hmm. What's it based on?"

"Marine Corps dress uniform. What you saw at the party was based on Scottish formal wear," she said.

"You've differenced it, nicely. No pockets or brass, I see. Both unnecessary. Nice cuffs. Can I see the originals?" Muriel went to her computer and brought up a picture of an officer's dress uniform. "Hmm. Very nice. Clean. Uncluttered. I notice that the original, the pants are lighter than the tunic. You use a light tunic. Why not darker pants?"

"Good question. Easy answer? I didn't think of it. Nor did Carla, who pretty much designed the uniforms for us," Muriel said. Then switched to a medium gray pants with the same off-white stripe down the legs.

"Actually, I like that better," Taylor said. "Distinctive. But I'd use a different color. Enlisted is the same, but with red piping, isn't it?" Muriel brought up a picture of the enlisted uniform. "White belt instead of same color belt. I notice that you use an off-white belt. Dad, does that warrant include military rank?"

"I don't know, son. Why?"

"Because I'm thinking of a crossover force. Yes, they'd be a national force. They'd have to be to transfer from regular regiments to my command. And that's the sticking point, 'my command'. Either I'm in command of them or I'm not. In addition, they'd be acting on behalf of Home inside the Embassy territory or for any action regarding Home, if Muriel would allow it that is. And yes, Muriel, I noticed your window. Marshal, indeed. Saul told me some of the things you've done."

"May I see that warrant again, please, son? I think there was something in there – in the wording of it." Taylor handed his father the warrant and waited while it was read. Finally, his father handed it back and said, "There's more here than I thought, but I'd only read it fast, before. Yes, you'd essentially be raising a regiment and would be its commander. Normally that confers a rank of Colonel. Would that be enough?"

"Quite. Muriel, what you may not realize is that the Marine Corps uniforms were modeled after those of the Household Division. I would difference them a bit differently, like this," and he changed. Light green tunic over dark green trousers. Light green belt with a plain, gold buckle. The trousers were bloused over twelve inch boots. There were red stripes down the trouser legs and red piping down the button line of the tunic and around the base and collar. The biggest change, though were the light green gauntlets. The epaulettes sported two pips and a crown.

"Dad, is this about right?"

"Exactly. Remarkable look. Something of a blend of what Muriel did and the Household Division uniforms. What about your stripes?" asked his father.

"If I may, like mine, but up where the button would be," Muriel said. "And, if you acting inside your Embassy grounds, replace the crown with the Home logo. We'll be showing you how to create that, later. You're an Ambassador, now, so you qualify to be able to create the logo, which means that you'll be able to hand out passports, too, since the logo is part of them."

"Excuse me, miss . . . ." the Prince started.

"Muriel," she interjected.

"Um . . . Muriel. Are you saying that he's an Ambassador Plenipotentiary?"

"Yes, of course. Oh, he'll have basic rules to follow, but he won't find them to be too hard to do. Things like the Home Logo can only go on things that pertain to Home, such as

the passports, his uniform or that of his troops or Envoys, or on diplomas issued by the University of Home. In fact, I think that's just about it. There aren't any real trade agreements that can be made, since Home has nothing except maybe coffee and knowledge that anyone else would want. And there's nothing from earth that Home wants. Travel is simple. If you can get to Home and return under your own power, then you're a Citizen. If you can't, then you're just a visitor."

"It's still . . . well, it's unheard of!"

"Not really," Muriel said. "Back in the history of earth it was common for Ambassadors to be given Plenipotentiary powers due to the extreme travel and communication problems. It's only recently that they've dropped off. Of course, Taylor can always come by or send to us for information on what he can or can't do. But I don't see any problem with him going to parties or functions. He can't sign for any agreement, because there's nothing to agree to. Oh, a treaty would have to come back to Ted and I. But he could work out most of the details, himself, then pass it to us for our approval. In fact, Ted could give him a copy of the one we have with America to use as the basis. He has the right to hire lawyers or whatever you call them, or employees in whatever capacity, and we'll pay their wages or salaries. He's the man on the spot, so he'd be the one to know what he needs. I see no reason to restrict him to some arbitrary standard that doesn't fit the situation."

"I agree," Ted said, instantly. "Right now, Taylor doesn't know what he doesn't know. He'll learn as he goes along. In the mean time, I'd expect that he'd ask a lot of questions. Some of them Saul would be able to answer right off the top of his head, because he's an Envoy and knows what other Envoys know and is able to ask any of them directly working in an area just about anything. He'd even be able to set up a holding company to act as controlling parent company for anything commercial that he thinks would be of benefit. We've got one, ourselves, and Muriel heads it."

"Basically," Muriel added, "I'd expect that Saul would be the organizer and implementer. Much like Mata is for me. I didn't have to learn how to build an office. I just had to have an idea of what I wanted. Mata delegated the actual building to members of my squads, and it got done. I don't 'run' the holding company, as such. But I do direct how I expect it to behave in a commercial environment, and how the individual companies are expected to behave. I oversee that, of course, but since the managers of the companies are Envoys, and the manager of the holding company is an Envoy, there's no possibility of deceptive or unethical practices being carried out. So, mostly it's a case of 'is the company making money, and if not, how can we get it to make money, legitimately'."

"But what about warfare?" Taylor's father asked.

"Shields are basically defensive," Muriel said. "In actual fact, I used those shields defensively so well that it constituted an all out attack on a bunch of bullies. And I wasn't completely trained at that point. Since then, I've found ways to use them offensively, and Taylor will learn about those. But their greatest ability and attraction is in their defensive abilities. I've literally been shot at, numerous times, even by tanks. I've even had a chain bomb wrapped around me. I'm still here, and the people, with one exception, that tried to kill

me are either in jail or dead by their own hand. We're dangerous because we can get information that the best of the alphabet groups can't get. In fact, we're under contract to the Federal Government to do just that, in limited ways."

"By the way, your Highness," Ted added, "from the time Taylor was named Ambassador he's been drawing a salary. It goes into a trust fund until he's of age. In addition, he gets food and shelter as needed, as well as medical attention and education. If you want maintenance funds to cover anything at home, we'd be glad to provide that, too. Muriel's the same way, and her parents elected to not take the maintenance, because they were, by that time, living in Enclave themselves, and Muriel had her own apartment."

"That isn't a requirement," Muriel added. "My squads set it up in case I felt it necessary to stay overnight once in a while. As it turned out, my parents came to stay here, and shortly after Enclave's doctor happened to visit them and cure them of some serious conditions and diseases. Cured them so well that they felt much younger than they had in years. I found it expedient to make use of my apartment right off the bat. Not too long after, they began to realize that I was different, and had responsibilities that I'd never had before. In short, that I was now my own person, though still their child. I think they also enjoyed having their freedom from having to constantly care for and oversee me. Oh, they care, I have no question of that. Look how fast they were to offer their house as a target for your translation practice. And I visit and stay overnight, mostly on weekends. We're still very much a family, but one now based on mutual love and respect."

"Well, that's all for later," Taylor said. "I can see that there's a lot to do before I get anywhere near that point. First I have to find out where I'll be putting this Enclave Extension, and figure out how to build it."

"I may be able to help you with that, if you like," Ted said.

"Which means I'd jolly well better listen up and accept your advice," Taylor said with a grin.

"Almost. This property is owned by us, outright. It's not a gift from the government. I purchased it as a foreign national, paid the taxes on it for one hundred years ahead, then got the walls and buildings, streets, utilities and such up in two weeks. Many of the Envoys that helped build it stayed on in one capacity or another. I can show you, or help you do that, as well as supply the funds from Home to pay for it. I can help you with the treaty, so your government doesn't put any 'gotchas' in it. Lawyers. At first we made do with ones from outside. After a while I found that it would be better if we had our own, that knew all our past history, so we have our own firm, here. Things like that. By all means, feel free to ask. We'll even try to translate it into what you would need for your society, though you might have to help us with that side of it."

"Didn't the government balk at all that?" asked the Prince.

"They tried. In several different ways," Ted said. "They failed. When you entered Enclave you entered what is essentially a different country. This is, in actuality, an extension

of Home. And the rules of the leaders of Home govern here. That the leaders also happen to be the main Ambassadors simply makes the joke funnier.”

“Wait a minute,” the Prince said, “you mean that you're absolute rulers?”

“Yep. One hundred percent. Well, as far as it goes, anyway. We were selected by the Envoys, and recently Muriel and I swapped positions as to who was THE Ambassador. Oh, we won't go hog wild. The Envoys and our own balance won't allow it. And we get LOTS of input from our Envoys,” Ted said. “In fact, there's exactly one law on the books, and it's enforced by our own police department. It's against the law to disturb the peace. Mostly, people are just warned, and they settle down. Once in a while they're ejected and refused readmission. That's it.”

“So, you don't have any controls on you?” the Prince asked.

“Of course we do,” Ted replied. “We were selected as leaders by the Envoys. They could UN-select us just as easily. Maybe easier, now that there are more humans with the training. We just seem to be doing the sorts of things that they feel need to be done, but didn't know how to do themselves. In a sense, it's the ultimate democracy.”

“Well,” Muriel said, “we have things to show you, if you care to learn them. Some of them are minor tricks. Others have far reaching possibilities. Most of them involve the use of shields. Some involve a specialized use of mental linking. The most striking, though, may be in how we provide PhD courses to students, and why they work the way they do. And for that I'll turn you over to some of my friends, first, then to the squad that started the whole training thing just to help me out in school.”

# Chapter 28

## Art for Art's Sake (Monday morning)

It was hard for Muriel to get out of bed, Monday morning. Long hours with Taylor, showing him how to be a boss without being a boss – or, in other words, let the Envoys do it, and simply act and react to situations as they presented themselves. Also, all the tricks with shields and how to apply the Home logo, introducing him to the lawyers and Triple E to give him an idea of the scope of the job. Taylor had taken copious notes on everything that wasn't a 'hands-on' thing, like flying. She also introduced him to how she was outrageous, and why.

"It's like this," she'd said, "if I'm being outrageous and comical, then I'm not appearing to be a threat. That is, until it's time for me to let them see the teeth and claws." She showed him some of the videos and records of events in her past, and showed him how appearing to be an innocent and happy-go-lucky person could draw out the very ones that needed to be shown a lesson. "By appearing comical, literally making fun of myself, I have people laughing WITH me, while at the same time ridiculing those that are the bullies of society."

She showed him the episode at school, putting down the bullies, then the arms demonstration to show how shields could be used as the ultimate defense. Then she moved on to the rescue of the Embassy workers in a hostile environment, which had him gasping. She also showed how she could use anger, when needed, by showing him the Sunday morning assault on an organized religion. Once he understood the background of the situation he was astounded that she'd used such restraint in only letting the ministers and congregation judge themselves. Muriel was careful, with that video, to NOT play it on anything that would re-trigger the judgment in Taylor.

And suddenly Taylor had a realization of just how young this self-assured girl actually was. He did tell her that Sid and a couple of the Envoys from Guest House were training his other two guards, and that he intended to use Sid as a lieutenant and the others as sergeants when he started forming his regiment. Saul, on the other hand, had already upgraded Taylor to high school graduate.

And now it was Monday morning, and Chuck was rattling around in the kitchen, which meant that Muriel had better have pajamas and dressing gown on before she removed the curtain. She staggered the length of the apartment to her bathroom and tried to wake up under the shower. She was only partially effective, but was in better shape when she came out for breakfast.

"Morning, Chuck," she said as she sat down.

"Morning, young lady," he replied. "I know you haven't heard the news, what with being involved in everything under the sun. But we finally got some information from Art. We've been taking it slow and letting him offer things instead of going in after them."



"That's reasonable. So, what did you find out?"

"You were right," he said. "Humans were the combination of Envoy souls in manufactured bodies. Bodies that could reproduce, but would still need souls to activate them. He did NOT say at what point the soul entered the body, though we have a bit of a guide from infant behavior."

"Basically," Muriel said, "you're saying it's sometime after conception."

"Yep. We're just not absolutely sure when, or whether it's a sliding scale sort of thing – a range of time after conception when it takes place. And, for Art's sake, we're not pushing. I think that in time there'll be more that he can tell us," Chuck replied. "What triggered this was that Art finally faced the moment he'd been taken over by the parasite. This was apparently the last thing he'd been working on before the take-over. Well, he and a number of others. In his case, he was just the historian for the event. We don't know who was actually doing the technical stuff, yet."

"Well, that's something, anyway," she said. "Something big. It means that humans are Envoys in a body. I'm patient. Sure, I'd love to know more about it, but it'll wait. And one way or another I'll find out. How is Art doing otherwise?"

"Better. MUCH better. He's stopped being suicidal. He now recognizes who he is and where he is, and admits that none of it was his fault. He's become interested in art and concerts, and you," Chuck tucked the last in without any fanfare. But Muriel caught it.

"What do you mean, 'and me'."

"Well, you and Ted. But primarily you," he said. "What Art said was, 'she's completing the work'. I think he means that by getting the training out there you're finishing whatever it was that they were trying to do. And I tend to agree. I see the differences in people, before and after the training. So does the manager of Guest House. In fact, he was the first to see it. Mark agrees, too, though in more technical terms."

"OK, THAT woke me up. Could I have been set up for it?"

"I don't think so. I think it was just your nature. You may have made the trip many times before this time, you know. And you wouldn't know about them until you died and were back in Home. And, as far as I know, there's just no way to imprint the training prior to the soul entering the body. Ted found you just at the time when you had enough experience with a body to understand it a bit, and were still malleable enough to learn easily. Then you refined the training so anyone could take it. Hit and miss, sometimes, and having to allow for individual personality differences. And ages. That surprised Art, that you could train adults, too."

"It's accelerating, Chuck. Now it's gone international. At least started to. And it'll go further through Europe and Australia. Asia and the Middle East will be the problem, because

of their religious beliefs and societal structure.”

“Well, if you don't complete it, then somebody will. It won't go backward, now,” he said.

“You really think so?”

“Definitely. We'd seen this before the parasite took . . . .” Muriel just looked at him for a minute.

“Chuck,” she finally said. “How much do you know?”

“Not much,” he said, just as Mark sent to Muriel that he wanted in.

Mark arrived in a full lather. “Sit!” Muriel commanded, before he could get a word out. “You're not going to help things or get information any faster by throwing a temper tantrum. And you know I can out-do you.” And Mark sat.

“Can I get you something, Mark?” Chuck asked.

“Only the truth! Have you been feeding Art?”

“No. I wouldn't do that. Art was my friend. Still is, for all that. I met him when the project started – as a casual experiment. It soon gained popularity and recruits. Art was there as a historian. He was already noted for that, and considered the best. I was on a low rung of the enterprise, so I didn't know or understand a lot of what went on around me. Mostly, I swept floors and took care of discards, and such. A janitor, if you will.” Chuck sighed. “I found out that Art and I had some outside interests that we shared, and struck up the friendship with him because of those. The bright boys had gone through about three generations of humans that didn't fully work out. Then three more of pretty successful generations, but something was still lacking, when the parasite hit and the purges began.”

“I was overlooked. I was just a janitor, not one of the bright boys that resisted the parasite,” he said. “Art. Poor Art was caught right in the middle of it. But the parasite never really knew about earth and humans until later, after the purge. So they didn't know that Art was involved as a historian for them. By the time it knew about humans Art was already taken over, and no longer had any memories of it that he could access. I stuck by Art, tried to protect him when I could. When Ted blew through Home and removed the parasite, he considered building Enclave. The support from the Envoys was tremendous. That's why he had the funds to pull it off. Then you came along and turned everything upside down.”

“Chuck,” Muriel said, “you said that you'd seen this before, that it could take off by itself after a certain point. OK, that's not quite what you said but that's what it sounded like you meant.”

“Yes, the last three generations, we'd started teaching them the techniques. Then that other thing – that thing that was in Tex – arrived, and Envoys died. By the time we got back in control, earth could no longer reach us. But the training had continued, some. About as

many trainees training others as you've achieved, now. That was just before the parasite. We still don't know how it got in."

"You also said that I may have cycled through many times."

"Muriel, don't pressure me. I just don't know."

"But you THINK you do. You think you know who I was."

"Maybe! Only maybe!" he exclaimed. "And only because of certain mannerisms that you and he have in common. But it could also be a half-dozen other Envoys."

"All right, Chuck. I'm not trying to accuse you of anything, and I'm not asking names. But I am going to pressure you in another direction. Ted died. Then he recreated his body and came back."

"Yes. Oh! I see where you're going. Yes, he would have remembered who he was and all the past lives. I don't know if he retained it when he ensouled the recreated body, though. I never asked him. Heck, I didn't even remember any of this for centuries."

"OK, then what about Bob Garcia? He's a human that Mark put in a recreated body," Muriel asked.

"Oh . . . oh, my. Oh, yes," Chuck said, covering his face. "Bob knows. Which means it's likely that Ted knows. I even recognized Bob. It isn't supposed to be able to be done. But Mark didn't put the limiters on Bob that most humans have. Oh, Mark! I'm sorry. We're talking about you, as if you weren't here . . . ."

"No problem, Chuck. Well, both of you, actually. You were following a train of thought, and it was heavyweight. Muriel, I think I know what you want to know. Not who you were, so much as what distinguished the possible Envoys that you might be. Simple. Personality characteristics. Chuck's right. There's only a half-dozen or so that it could be. All of them live in the now, all of them are somewhat outrageous. Jokers, if you will. Always out for a laugh or to have fun. And all absolute protectors and highly intelligent. And none of them are violent, as such, except when enraged. And then, you don't want to be within a hundred miles of them. Black panthers, all. It COULD be any one of them. But I think, like Chuck, that it's most likely one. The leader of them. And he'd never had a body before. Heck, he'd never used a human name, before."

"OK, here's where I'm going with this. It occurs to me that, if we're training Envoys in human bodies, and can tell their personality, then we can gear the training to that personality," Muriel said.

"Yes, that's possible," Mark said.

"More than that, we can figure out what jobs they'd feel comfortable doing, and train them for that. We need to talk to Ted. And maybe Bob," Muriel said. "No, on second thought,

definitely Bob. Let's get downstairs. Chuck, you too. Have someone else come up and clean up, or I'll do it after the discussion. I'm fully capable, you know."

"I know, Muriel," he said. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath and let it out. "Muriel, I'm sorry. I should have told you when I suspected."

"Nothing to be sorry about, Chuck. You needed to be sure. Well, surer than you were that day in Discussion Number One."

They translated to Muriel's office casual area, and Muriel sent to Ted and Bob to join them. It only took a short time to fill Ted and Bob in on the information. And then it was Ted's turn, as everyone looked at him, expectantly.

"Yes, OK, I'll confess," he said with a sigh. "Yes, I know who I am and my past lives. It was a set-up. I came back with one purpose – to be so enraged that when I died I'd go after who I felt was responsible for all the things in my life. Well, I did. But I found the parasite instead, and killed it. Then it all came flooding back, along with the judgment, and mixed with the rage. That's what fueled my building a body around myself. I intended to go back and get the little sucker that shot me. However, all that took long enough that the police finished the job for me. As I came up off my knees, I saw him enter judgment square. He took one look at me and self-destructed."

"So there I was with a brand new body, filled with rage, and no place to go. And Envoys were coming out of the woodwork, surrounding me. When things got sorted out, I found I'd been saddled with being the leader of home, and I had an idea of what I wanted to do. So, I spent a year setting up the Enclave scam, then went looking for you, Muriel."

"You know who I am?" she asked.

"Nope. But by then I knew that the group sent backup, in case I wasn't successful."

"Excuse me, Muriel, can we see you for a moment?" her mother asked. The others looked at each other, then vanished.

"I'm sorry, honey. I didn't mean to interrupt something."

"Don't worry about it, mom. I think we'd probably talked that one through as far as we could. And anything left we can pick up later. It wasn't anything important," Muriel said. "So, what can I do for you?"

"Um, well . . . we should have told you this, earlier, but . . . ."

A suspicion crept into Muriel's mind. "What? You're going to tell me that I'm adopted?" Her parents looked guilty, then nodded. "OK, first of all, YOU are my parents. First. Last. Always. And I love you and nothing is going to change that. OK?"

"But . . . you aren't upset?"

"Nope. Like I said. You're my parents. But I'd like to know how it happened," Muriel said.

"Oh. Well, best as we can tell, you were left at a fire station. All we know about that is that the dispatcher went to get a can of pop – right around the corner outside the door to the room. When he came back, you were in a basket on his desk. The front door was locked, so no one could get in without him letting them in, and he was always in sight of the front door, and in hearing of the room. He heard and saw nothing. Just suddenly, you were there," her mother said.

"Anyway, you needed someone to care for you, and we lived close by, and were in the foster parent program. So they assigned you to us. After a while we decided to make it permanent, if they'd let us, so we adopted you." Muriel went to where they were seated and hugged them both.

"Well," she finally said, "I'm afraid I have a confession to make, too."

"You're not angry with us? For not telling you, before?" asked her father.

"Nope. Maybe it had to wait for now. They never found the mother, did they?"

"No, hon. We're sorry, we looked, too," her mother said. "But there just wasn't any record of a baby being born or a girl that was pregnant then wasn't and no record of a baby. It was a real mystery."

"OK, well . . . wait a minute, Mata would you ask the guys to come back, please? I think I'm going to need them for this."

"Sure, Muriel," Mata said, looking up. Then, "Az?" And Muriel started shaking. "TED! CALEB!" Mata screamed, mentally as well as audibly. They translated in, and immediately went to her.

"OK, we've got you," Caleb said. "Just relax and let it pass."

"Fred, Lily, this isn't something you did," Ted said to them, over his shoulder. "Mata, you triggered her. So that's where you went, you idiot. Just couldn't trust me to do my job, huh?" And Muriel's shaking turned into laughter.

"Oh, mom, dad. I'm afraid I've REALLY got a confession to make," she said, still laughing. "Just let me settle down a bit. Mata, any chance of some coffee?"

"Sure . . . I'll get it."

# Chapter 29

## Game Changer (Monday morning)

Mark, Bob and Chuck came into the casual area. “Az,” Mark said. “So that's where you went.”

“What's happening,” asked Fred. “Is she all right?”

“Oh, better than all right, I'd say,” said Caleb. “She knows who she is. Just give her a minute to pull herself back together. Oh, my. Never could let someone else do the job, could you.”

Muriel, still laughing, but not as hard, said, “Nope. Oh, my. The biggest joke of all, and I pulled it on myself.”

“Mom, dad, I have a confession to make. Oh, my, do I have a confession. Look, you need some background or you won't understand the joke.” So she told them about the discussion of where humans came from, and whether they were Envoy souls in human bodies. When she finally got to Art's retrieved memories, her parents gasped.

“So. We needed someone to get rid of the parasite. We set Ted up. He was a warrior, and volunteered for the job. When he was killed he came blazing into Home in a full rage, and killed it. But we didn't know if it would work, so we decided on having a backup. Instead of working through the normal procedure of putting an Envoy soul – and yes, all souls are actually Envoy souls – into a human body, we created a new body and put me into it. That's why they couldn't find the mother and couldn't figure out the 'locked-room' mystery. They translated me directly to his desk as soon as he was out of sight. You might say that this makes immaculate conception look like a Sunday school picnic. Maybe an immaculate MIS-conception?”

“I must have been close to triggering when I asked Mata to bring Ted, Chuck, and Bob back into my office. And she recognized me and it triggered me into remembering who I was and why I was here.”

“She called you Az,” her father said.

“it's from an old name, and pretty much unpronounceable in human language. Along with everyone else, I ended up getting a nickname. Az. First two letters of that unpronounceable one. Well . . . that's past. I'm Muriel, now. So, you see, I never had a natural mother for you to find. And I'm SO glad it was you two that took me in. Ted, we trusted you. We didn't trust the parasite. How is it that you didn't recognize me, in school?”

"Oh, that. By that time I'd given up trying to find you. With a whole world for you to be in, I really had no way of knowing where you were. I just knew that you'd show up, sometime. Well, not you, as such. But that someone would. That's why I wasn't looking for you or anyone, specifically, anymore," Ted said.

"Well, getting Matthew to become Mata and try to train me almost triggered me right there and then," Muriel said. "It's just as well that I didn't fully trigger. I wouldn't have been ready for it. I needed more experience with human life. But it explains the change I went through. The confidence and outrageousness. My old personality was starting to bleed through. It also explains why I was so easy to train. I didn't have the limits on me that human children have. So I was able to unconsciously tap the information locked behind the trigger."

"Oh, why are we even discussing this – it all doesn't matter in the long run," Muriel said. "I'm me. Period. Muriel is in control simply because she's had more experience and a more active personality than the original soul did. This all makes for an interesting aside, but beyond the fact that it's established that humans are Envoy souls in a physical body there's really no importance to it. And we were already leaning in that direction when we indicated on the citizenship form that some people were 'the protectors of the Children of Home'."

"So, where does that take us?" asked Ted.

"Where I was heading for to begin with," Muriel said. "Being able to suggest to people possible college courses based on personality type. Being able to tell what kind of basic support people would need in the Ambassadorial levels. Oh, I know, everything changes. And I lucked out. Mata's an organizer, and that's something that I just never was any good at. The rest of my crew are jack-of-all-trades. Ted's crew are primarily administrative – no offense, Ted."

"None taken," he said, casually. "You're right. It's what I needed. Once Enclave was built I really didn't need to be a warrior any more. Oh, I still am, but I'm a better administrator. You know," he added, "I bet we could go right down through your friends and see the same sort of thing. Don's got a bunch of educators and research assistants. Tommy's group sits around think deep thoughts on the ineffability of ineffability or something. Bobby's got Envoys that can be just about anything from casual friend to, oh, I don't know what. Jeff's got a room full of engineers. Fran's got a room full of support doctors that can double as nurses. And Carla! Sheesh! She calls them detailers, and in a sense she's right. They add the petty details that make things distinctive to the styles she comes up with, and either finds or makes the furniture that she suggests for interior decorating."

"Yea, something like my crew did in setting up my office and apartment. I gave them broad strokes of ideas, and they prettied them up," Muriel said.

"What brought all this up, anyway?" asked Ted.

"Taylor," Muriel said. "He's going to need a support group. Some of it should be Envoy. Oh, his 'security detail' will be the regiment he'll raise. And I have no doubt that they

will be 'adequate'. And we can help them with college courses. But he's got an Enclave to build, and getting that set up is going to take organizational skills, engineers, builders, cooks and such. Oh, and much more. We can't just turn him loose and say, 'go forth and Ambassador'. You certainly didn't do that to me!"

"No," Ted said, "but I did it to me. Oh, I know. Not the same. And you're right. You walked into an active, functioning Enclave and didn't have to make those decisions. And even I had help. Maintenance section should actually be called Engineering. We got service people like crazy, and half of them ARE administrators. And you're right about my squads. I've NEVER had to use them the way you do. And right now he's got three soldiers and an Envoy who's major ability is in education. OK, how do we go about this?"

"Right off hand, I'd say the first thing we need is to find out what he needs. What kind of image he wants to project. You did yours, and it's great. But his country is different. Different styles, different attitudes to history – even a sort of reverence to historical things. Tradition, if you will."

"Excuse me, Muriel," said Saul from the entrance to her casual area.

"Yes, Saul, what can I do for you?"

"There's a couple of things that Taylor would like to know – some things that he wants to ask you, if you don't mind."

"Of course I don't mind. Where is he?"

"Oh, he's over talking to some of your friends, right now. He just got back."

"Ooo! Mysteries. This sounds like fun. Can some of the others come, too?"

"Of course, Muriel. We'd hoped that Ted might join us, if he wasn't busy."

"Sure," Ted said, and they walked over to her friend's offices.

As they walked in, Taylor looked up from something that Don seemed to be doing. "Hi, Muriel. Hey, how do you manage to get that peculiar look to your tunic, and the stripes on your legs?"

"Oh, that? You could have asked Carla. She created the original. She calls it pixie dust. That, and the material, itself is slightly iridescent. So, what are you working on?"

"Oh, I found a prime location for Enclave, and we're sorting out how to place buildings and such," Taylor said. As Muriel moved forward she saw that Don had created an image in three dimensions of an irregularly shaped plot of land.

"And where did you find this 'location'," Muriel asked like a statement.



"Oh, it's a place I know well. It's where I've been going to school," Taylor replied, innocently. And Ted roared with laughter.

"Muriel, he just did you one better. Rather than fight them, he BOUGHT them," Ted said.

"Oh," Taylor said, "I've still got to confront them and give them their eviction notice. That'll be tomorrow morning, as school starts. Sid has my other two guards recruiting two more. I'll have a squad to go with me, tomorrow. Armed, I'm afraid. I hope you don't mind."

"Why should I mind?" asked Muriel. "You use the cultural symbols that you're comfortable with. And, since you're a regimental commander in your country, it seems fitting. Do you need help getting people trained enough to go with you?"

"No, I think we have that covered. Saul called on some Envoys from Home to help. Bobby is helping me work out a real show to put on, making my entrance. In very royal style, of course. Would you like to come along? Um . . . It might be better if you wore a dress . . . ."

"No," Muriel said, flatly. "However, I might go this far," and changed into the kilted version of formal wear.

"You know," said Carla, with a giggle. "We really ought to change your uniform a bit." And a one inch red stripe formed on the outside edge of her fly plaid and kilt apron. And her kilt hose turned red. Muriel looked, and laughed.

"Of course. I've been blooded. But it shouldn't be so bright," and Muriel changed it to a darker red, bordering on a wine color. "There! The blood of my enemies," she said, laughing. "You kids deserve it, too, you know. For some of the things we've gone through."

"We'll see," said Carla. "Right now, we're just trying to get you outfitted for your appearance, tomorrow. Here, Taylor. Here's how you get that shimmer-glisten effect on tunic and trouser stripes. And do you prefer shoes? Or boots?"

"Boots, definitely. I may be a Colonel, but I'm a working Colonel," he said. "Or, do you think I should be formal, tomorrow?"

"I'd say, since you're attending business, then normal dress uniform for you, and either that or utilities for your squad," Muriel said. "Either way, your guns should work. Am I allowed to take a squad with me?"

"Of course. It would be expected," Taylor said.

"Oh, great. Six Envoys, in utilities with 'Security' triangles on their sleeves prowling panther style. Now if THAT doesn't make somebody nervous I don't know what would. Except maybe your squad holding fully automatic rifles at their hip, aimed forward," Muriel said, laughing. "I expect that your eviction notice will be honored within two days of your handing it to them."

"Well," Taylor said, "we can hope. Maybe less." And he grinned at her. "In any case, this would be the enclosed portion of the Enclave. At the front on the right would be Reception, Guest House and Visitors Hotel. On the opposite side, shops and restaurants. At the back would be the Embassy offices. Oh, the whole thing will be declared an Embassy, of course, but my physical office would be there in the center. Legal to the left as you look at it. Medical to the right. Once the full regiment is formed there would always be two squads wandering around the grounds as individuals. Outside, to the left, would be the parade ground, and I expect to put on quite a show for people, there. Yes, we'll be hiring civilians – I've seen what you've done here and approve – as well as having Envoy staff."

"That's quite something. Looks somewhat like a fort or castle."

"Intentionally so," Taylor said. "It's the expected thing. The difference between this one and most of our military installations is that this one would be open to the public – a show piece, if you will. Both for my nation's military and for Home."

"Will you have a full squad ready to go, tomorrow?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, sure. Sid knows what I need, and has a team of Envoys to help him. Oh, you mean trained well enough in Envoy techniques? Well, for tomorrow, mostly all they have to do is show up and do military stuff. They don't have to fly or anything. And that way you had of holding the rifles is a tactic that is taught in the military. Plus, these guys, to become guards for royalty, pretty much have to be drill team quality."

"Wait a minute! Where are you recruiting from?"

Taylor grinned. "My father's team," he said, busting out laughing.

Muriel joined him, then said, "Won't your father be upset?"

"He'd better not be. He's the one that suggested it. And he's helping train them. You know," he said, reflectively, "I think this is the first time he's ever been behind something that I was doing. He suggested the castle effect. Part of our national heritage. Oh, and he's got his own Envoy, too, now," Taylor added.

"Is he going to try to take over on you?"

"Nope. This is my baby. Oh, he makes suggestions and all. And can be very helpful dealing with the crown. No, I really think he's doing this to help me get set up right. He's quite happy with the job that he has," he said. "Oh, and mother has taken using shields as cloth to a whole new level. When the castle is built – that'll take about a week according to Saul – she's got a flag to fly from the top of it. Even if there's no wind."

"Oh, my!" Muriel said. "Something I never thought of. You know, Taylor, you're becoming outrageous in your own, subtle way. You're definitely going to put on a show."

“Sir?”

“Sid! When did you get back?” asked Taylor.

“Just now, sir. They're ready for tomorrow. We'll give them the rest after you're done. Did you get . . . ?”

“Yes. Yes I did. And I think it's going to go better than I thought. Muriel's bringing a squad of Envoys. They don't march. They prowl like panthers.”

“You're kidding!” Sid said.

“Excuse me, Taylor. I'll meet you out front in a minute,” Muriel said, and translated.

A minute later a voice from outside said, “Holy Crap! What is that?” Sid and Taylor went outside, looked, and started laughing. Muriel was casually walking toward Taylor's new squad. Behind her was Mata and one of the squads that looked like kids. No formation, watching all directions, and looking like they were ready to attack anything that moved. Good thing the squad didn't move.

Muriel went between the ranks. Mata and the squad followed, looking the men over with obvious interest. And slowly licking their lips on occasion. One of them paused by a troop and sniffed, then passed on.

“As you were, men. They're on our side,” Taylor said, laughing.

“Are you sure, sir? I think I just wet myself,” the one that the Envoy had taken an interest in said. “Are they obedience trained?”

Muriel came back, and her squad formed up behind her, smiling sweetly. “Yes, they're on your side, troop,” Muriel said. “We'll be behind you. Anybody gets close, they get a personal experience with an Envoy. Oh, and they know the same trick that my friends pull sometimes.” Six wolf heads suddenly appeared on the Envoys – one white and five gray. Muriel just looked sweet, then changed to her black panther head and paws, with claws extended. “Outrageous enough for you, Taylor?”

Taylor was so busy laughing that Sid had to hold him up. “Quite . . . quite . . . outrageous . . . enough,” he sputtered. Muriel was nice. She made a chair for him to sit in before he fell over, then looked at his new squad. “Welcome to Enclave, gentlemen. My name is Muriel, and I'm an Ambassador.”

“Strike that,” Ted said from behind her. As he moved forward he said, “She's THE Ambassador from Home to the people of earth. She's also THE Leader of Home. And if she's going with you tomorrow then all you have to do is keep your shields up and try to stay out of the way of the bodies,” he added with a grin. “And she has WAY too much fun being outrageous. But we love her, anyway.” He put his arm around her shoulders.

“So,” Ted said to Muriel, “why are you terrorizing these poor people?”

“If they know what to expect from us, then they'll be able to act normally and ignore us tomorrow morning,” she replied. She turned to the squad and said, “Why don't you go introduce yourselves and show them that you're actually harmless.”

Her squad moved off to the men, smiling and laughing and acting like kids. Mata, in the mean time went up to Sid and made sure he knew who she was. Taylor had finally calmed down, by that time.

“I would have sworn that NOTHING could have shaken that crew,” he said. “But to have what looked like kids have that effect on them, hardened soldiers, well . . . I feel sorry for the school tomorrow. And you are a REAL beast. Are you sure you're human?”

“You met my parents. Yes, I'm a real girl. And no, I wasn't originally made of wood by a kindly toy maker,” she said, grinning.

“So, what's tomorrow?” Ted asked.

“He's serving an eviction notice on his school,” Muriel said.

“Ouch! That's cold.”

“Not just that,” Taylor said. “They've been decertified and lost their accreditation. They can no longer function as a school, and can't feed or house children on the premises. They are DONE done. Some of the worst of the bullies, there, are from high ranking families. And no other school would put up with them. They've been thrown out of all the good ones.”

“How'd you end up there, then?” Ted asked.

“Luck, I guess,” Taylor said. “Fortunately, this is the only year I've been there, and my parents didn't know what they were like. They were going to place me in another school, anyway, next year. Now, they don't have to. They can say I'm being home schooled, and no one can say that I'm not, because I have my own private tutor.”

“How far along are they with their training?” Muriel asked.

“They haven't been to Home, yet, miss,” Sid said. “I didn't think it was a good idea so soon before our little show.”

“Good point. And Sid . . . just Muriel, please.”

“Miss, I can't do it. You are a person of rank – the Leader of Home, an Ambassador, and the Marshal of the Forces of Home. It's either miss or ma'am. And I don't feel like getting eaten alive by a young lady for calling her ma'am,” Sid said.

“Sid, you know what a leader is? Somebody that's going in a particular direction, and

everyone else is chasing her. It's not that I'm leading. It's that everyone else is following. Ambassador and Marshal were both jokes. One was a way to protect me from America's State Department. The other . . . do you see any weapons in the hands of the Envoys? How can I be a Marshal if the 'army' I command doesn't have any weapons?"

"Yes, miss. But you are going in a direction, and others think well enough of it to follow you. That makes you a leader. And you DO represent Home and this Enclave's interests as an Ambassador, and you've taught me that an army doesn't need to have weapons to be effective. Miss," Sid said.

"You're going to keep doing that, aren't you?"

"Yes, miss."

"Give it up, Muriel. He's been like that since I met him. The one outstanding feature of him is that he's absolutely loyal. And a good protector," Taylor said. "He won't change. It's a cultural thing."

# Chapter 30

## Game On

(Tuesday morning)

The rest of Monday was taken up with teaching Taylor's new squad how to work as a whole. First, connecting to the group mind, so they each knew what the others were doing to be able to coordinate their actions. Second, practice in group translating. And third, how to fly. The first gave them confidence to perform 'drill team' maneuvers that usually took months to perfect. The second made them comfortable with all coming out in the same place at the same time, and in formation. But the third made them VERY happy. Being able to fly was an exhilarating experience, and gave new meaning to the term 'mounted division'.

“With a host of furious fancies  
Whereof I am commander,  
With a burning spear and a horse of air,  
To the wilderness I wander.”

“What's that, Taylor?” Muriel asked.

“Tom O'Bedlam,” he replied. “They're definitely mounted on a 'horse of air'. If we had a burning spear, then I'd know that I was completely mad.”

“Um . . . maybe this isn't the best time to tell you, but . . . ,” Muriel began.

“You've found a way to make a weapon, haven't you?”

“Well, yea. It's a way of channeling power, like a laser, but it can destroy right down to the subatomic level. We don't use it very much. It's just too dangerous.”

Taylor roared with laughter. “You know, Sid was right. You really are a Marshal. And you DO have a weapon. So, teach. I'll be Mad Tom, commanding furious fancies. Talk about outrageous. NOW I see why you do it. You turn your defensive attacks into something so ridiculous that nobody suspects what you could actually do in anger. You make a joke of the efforts of others to control you.”

“Well, it's effective. Actually, more effective than you may think. By making their efforts look ridiculous, they feel humiliated. It's the reversal of what they try to do to me. Bullies try to humiliate and put people down by physical force or some other application of power – money or political influence or religious dogma, for example. I just turn it back against them in such a way that they CAN'T combat it. And suddenly they find that they are the ones being bullied,” Muriel said. “And they don't like it. Well, this isn't getting you trained.”

She took him to the wasteland and showed him how it was done. Then he practiced until his control was so good that he could write his name on a rock. She also showed him

how to project his voice so that he could speak quietly and still be heard over a wide area. By the time they got back to his troops, they had mastered what they needed for the next morning.

No plan ever survives the first engagement with the enemy. Some impatient enemies don't even wait that long. Tuesday morning found the driveway to the school blocked by police cars. Even the road was blocked. Muriel got the image from Taylor, then raised the point of view up so she got an aerial view.

"They're not inside the gates. But I don't like having an enemy behind me," Muriel said. "So, we're going to give them a choice. Move, or be moved. And if we have to move them, then it'll be to the nearest jail large enough to hold all of them. Actually, that may be the one we have in an old warehouse here in Enclave. We'll translate to the air above them, and I'll go in first. Trust me, they won't try to fire on me. I have some other skills that you haven't learned yet, as well as some appearances that should quell anyone even thinking about it."

"What do you mean?"

"I can go full blown 'Angelic Rage' on them. Really put the fear of me in them, if I have to. But none of us like to do that. Feathers, you know. Anyway," she continued, "once I've got you on the ground, it'll be up to you to establish your bona fides. Can you do that?"

"No problem. NO one in our country would dare to doubt me when I'm done," he replied.

"Then let's go."

They came out above the road, right at the end of the driveway. **MAKE A HOLE!** Muriel's quiet voice rang out against the hills surrounding the area. She didn't wait for them, but landed directly in the middle of the mess, and used her shields to create the hole she'd ordered. **WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE!** she sent out.

"I am," came a pompous voice, followed by an overstuffed blue uniform surmounted by an outraged, red face.

**WRONG! HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS, PRINCE TAYLOR, COLONEL IN CHIEF OF THE REGIMENT OF HOME IS IN CHARGE HERE!** she said, and used her shields to push cars and men back far enough for both her squad and Taylor's to land.

"Ah, good morning," Taylor said, in the upper-class way that royalty could affect. "So nice of you to show up to greet me. However, you needn't have bothered. This is merely a private affair, don'tcha know. Just clear the way, man, and we'll be about it. Then you can do whatever you want."

"Boy! I don't take orders from some wet-nosed snot. You're under arrest." The police commander made the mistake of trying to grab Taylor. He ended up sticking to his shield.

"Really, my good man. Such behavior. And attempting to lay hands on a royal person without permission. Tch, tch. Well, you've torn it now. Muriel, could you, by any chance, manage to find a place to put this buffoon? He seems to have forgotten his manners." Muriel almost giggled over the way Taylor seemed to look down his nose without actually doing it. She caught the echo of Taylor's image of smelling something foul in the road.

"Why, of course, your Highness. We have ample space for all these persons, and the cars can just be stacked on the side of the road, out of the way," she managed to say, sweetly.

"Oh, I'm sorry," Taylor said to the commander, "I didn't properly introduce you. Buffoon, this is Muriel, the Leader of Home and Ambassador to the people of earth. She volunteered to escort me on my mission, today. And, since you didn't believe either her or me, allow me to show you some things of interest." He first pulled out his identification and displayed it. Then his Home passport with its distinctive green cover. And next, the royal warrant and the bill of sale for the property. Finally, he pulled out the document, signed by the crown, that decertified the school and removed its accreditation. "Now you see, this is an official visit, but not one that involves you. Yet. So . . . you either clear the way or find yourselves under arrest and held for the crown's pleasure. Is that clear?"

"Yes, your Highness," said the now pasty faced commander. "You lot!" he shouted, "Get these cars out of the Prince's way and get back to work!"

Mata casually sauntered over to the commander and looked at him. Then sniffed the air for a bit, and turned to Muriel. "Still smells like bully to me," she said.

"What ARE you?" the commander asked.

Mata looked back at him, then grew. Then changed to male. "Envoy," she said, and resumed her normal appearance. "Wanna make something of it?" Then she changed to the wolf's head and sniffed, again. Changed back, and smiled sweetly at him. There were teeth in the smile.

"Don't encourage her, commander," Muriel said. "I think she's been eating too much red meat, lately. Seems to have acquired a taste for it."

The commander didn't waste any time in bustling back to his car and leaving the scene. The way now clear, the Prince led the parade up the graveled driveway toward the school. Sid suggested to him that he might want to affect a swagger stick, and the Prince laughed.

"I did rather put on Lord Haw Haw pretty well, didn't I. And a swagger stick would be just the ridiculous touch that might be needed," he said with a grin. "Something like this?" and he created one.

"Very good, sir. It certainly makes you look like a silly royal fop. Good image."



"Exactly! Good! Thank you for the suggestion, Sid. By the way, I believe, as an officer, you could affect one, yourself." Sid just shuddered.

Sid fell in behind his Colonel and the squad fell in behind him, led by their sergeant. Muriel followed the Home Regiment squad, and Mata and the squad duplicated the general organization, but using their panther prowl instead of marching. Windows in the buildings on either side were open, and students heads readily in evidence. Directly ahead was the administration building and classrooms, and the porch in front of the main doors was lined with people.

::Mata, can we get a squad in there to lock down the computers? I should have thought of that, before. If there's anything on them about skimming or such, the Prince should have it available to him.::

::Already handled, Muriel. And it's not your place to think of petty details like that.::

::Piffle,:: Muriel sent back. ::I SHOULD be thinking of these things. It's nice that you cover for me. But I am supposed to consider the various ramifications of my actions.::

::Oh, dear! And just when I had you nicely trained, too. Now, you go and louse it all up by THINKING.::

Muriel didn't even try to hide the snicker she felt at that crack. She simply continued to walk up toward Administration as if she owned the place. She could feel Taylor's confidence build, echoing back off of her. He was beginning to realize his place. His squad made a show of doing drill team routines as they marched, including throwing rifles between themselves without apparently looking. Taylor calmly ignored what was going on behind him, and just kept walking, aimed at one particular person on the porch.

"Taylor, what's the meaning of this. What are you playing at, here."

"Herzog, you forget your place. Now get down here and address me properly." Taylor's voice, though not as loud as Muriel's had been, carried to everyone that was watching, and there were some snickers.

"Oh, so the little pup wants to play the royal, now, huh? Well," he said, with extreme sarcasm, "your Royal Highness, you'll be sorry . . . ."

Taylor didn't wait for him to finish, but grabbed him with a shield and put him three feet away, in front of him. "Now, then, Herzog, I think there are a few things that need to be straightened out, here. First, I've BEEN sorry since I first came to this school. But I'm not, today. Second, it's come to my attention that you haven't paid the rent on this property in two months, and haven't paid the taxes in two years. As a result, the property has been sold for taxes, and the new owner has made equitable arrangements with the previous owner. Since the new owner has found a better use for the property, you are hereby served with an eviction notice." A copy of the notice was held out to the man.

"Now, along with that," Taylor went on, "it's come to the crown's attention what the circumstances are here. As a result, this school is no longer certified as fit for human habitation, and it's accreditation has been pulled. What that means is that all the students must leave immediately."

"You won't get away with this, you young pup! I have friends in high places . . . ."

"Yes, yes, I'm sure you do. We'll have an opportunity to discuss your friends, later. In any case, I seriously doubt that any of them are higher than a Crown Prince. Or a Queen. Oh, and I almost forgot. Muriel, would you step forward, please? Yes, thank you. Herzog, allow me to present to you Muriel, THE Leader of Home and Ambassador to the people of earth." Muriel displayed her passport, open to the appropriate pages. "Now, since earthly princes don't intimidate you, perhaps you'd be more impressed by those NOT of earth. Or, perhaps not. Actually, it doesn't matter to me whether you're impressed or not. Muriel was instrumental in getting me trained in Envoy techniques. And, since I'd been so trained and made an Ambassador, myself, the crown saw fit to have me raise a regiment. The squad you see behind me are the beginnings of that regiment. They, too, have Envoy training. The guns are just for show, I'm afraid. Can't have soldiers without guns, now, can we. People wouldn't know who was dangerous."

Taylor gave a dramatic sigh, then addressed the students and live-in faculty and staff. "Get your things together and be prepared to leave. You have one hour. Anything left behind will be destroyed, so I suggest that you move quickly. Muriel," he said, turning to her, "would it be permissible for me to request assistance in their transportation?"

"I'd be happy to assist in any way I can," Muriel replied, also loudly enough for all to hear. "Mata, we'll need about a hundred Envoys, I think."

"Already requested and on their way, Ambassador. They'll even help them pack. Do NOT look in the kitchen. I've had a report on the conditions there, and I'm surprised that no one is seriously ill," Mata responded.

"Thank you, Mata, good and faithful Security Chief." And Mata hit her, and they both laughed. "Yea, I probably deserved that, didn't I. We'll discuss your use of the word 'Ambassador' later," she said, and grinned back.

Suddenly, the air was full of Envoys, each aiming for a different point in the buildings. In the mean time, Muriel's squad had wandered around the various people on the porch and causing some little examples of incontinence. Those people were very glad to leave the company of what looked like children and acted like panthers, to go pack.

"Well," asked Herzog, "Aren't you going to release me so I can pack?"

Taylor turned back to him. "No. Herzog, you are under arrest for various charges, not the least of which is contributing to the delinquency of minors, and child abuse. I'm sure there will be other charges, especially considering the reports I've just received concerning your various financial arrangements. Your possessions will be placed in storage until your release,

as I understand that you have no home outside of here. You'll be going with me to face a crown court."

"Colonel, sir, permission to allow the men a short break?" asked Sid.

"Of course. Just make sure that they keep a close attachment to their arms. Some of these little buggers are noted for their ability to cause apparently nailed down furniture to suddenly decide to go walk-about. Pairs, only. There are facilities inside and to the left," Taylor said.

"You know, Muriel," he said, turning back to her, "This may be the only regiment in history where the lowest rank is lieutenant. Well, once it's set up, of course, and they've been through the basic training."

"Yes. But will they be able to fight? Will they condescend to getting their hands dirty getting things done?" she asked.

"Oh, I think, considering that we'll be drawing them from the ranks and not from the officers, that won't be a problem. Particularly since their continued membership in the organization will depend on that willingness. Shouldn't your people be allowed a break?"

"Oh, one of them found a ball," and she pointed up in the air. "They'll be fine. Mata," she said to her friend and security chief, "wouldn't you like to join them?"

"Not on your life! Even at it's most boring, where you are is where the fun is. I've picked up new pointers in outrageousness just today. So, that's what the upper-crust behavior is like."

"No," said Taylor, "but that's the way it's portrayed on television and movies. Bad, isn't it. Oh, snobbery like that existed at one time, and there are people that would like to bring it back. Somehow, with Muriel around, I don't think they'll be successful. Do you realize that this is the most fun I've had in a long time? That poor Peeler commander. I doubt that he'll stay in that position very long. In fact, he may be examining his options on either transferring out or retiring right about now. He was in Herzog's pocket, you see."

As they spoke, the Envoys tasked with the evacuation had managed to whittle down the number of students to about half. And most of the staff was gone. "Do you have anything here, Taylor?" asked Muriel.

"Nothing I'd want to go in and get," he replied. "Losing things when I first got here showed me that nothing that really meant anything to me should be anywhere around this bandit crowd. Fortunately, nothing I lost was that important or valuable. I just reported it to my father and that was it. At first, he thought it was just the normal hijinks that you find at boy's schools. Later, he realized that it was deeper than that, and used reports from me to inform the crown what was going on."

"And then the troubles started," he said. "I started hearing voices in my head. And the

reports were discounted as being part of my affliction. Then you got me, Sid, and my parents trained, and we all realized what had happened. Dad went to the crown that night and explained – and proved – what had happened. And that did it. The crown issued the decertification and the removal of the accreditation based on my reports. He also brought the warrant back with him. The crown told him that if I wanted to do it, I could raise a regiment. He went back a couple of times for some clarification and further requests, but the crown readily approved. The idea of a complete regiment manned solely by Envoy trained personnel was too attractive to the crown to be passed up.”

“This, though,” Taylor said, “It was left up to me whether or not to close the school down. I was literally put in charge. Herzog may not realize it, but for today I was his boss. It was also left up to me as to when I should take action if I chose to. I'm afraid Saul made shameless use of your active squad, getting the financial information on the school, and finding out about the broken lease. He also was instrumental in getting the funds for me to buy the property. I hope you don't mind.”

“Nope. Don't mind at all. Your deciding to put an Enclave here took care of that. And my crew is often looking for things to do. We had a flurry of activity a few weeks back, but since then it's been fairly quiet. So I'm sure they enjoyed the change,” Muriel said.

“Well, anyway, the whole thing was worked out in advance. I was even given the power to arrest, if necessary and I could find evidence. That'll be going back with us, by the way. We'll give it to the crown court, and let them take the matter from there. Um . . . .”

“Out with it. I smell a setup coming,” she said.

“The crown would like to meet you,” he replied.

“Uh, huh.”

“I mean, like today.”

“Uh, huh.”

“Well?”

“Well, what?” Muriel said.

“Will you come? The crown already knows about you and how outrageous you can be. She's expecting it, actually. She thinks that it's refreshing that a leader can be like you, not afraid to be yourself.”

“Uh, huh.”

“Will you stop! Sheesh! You're driving me crazy. Look, it would mean a lot to me. It would mean a lot to her. And she's gone out of her way to make putting an Enclave in the country a possibility.”

"Taylor, listen to me. Uh, huh. Yes. OK. I'm coming. I just hope she knows what she's getting into."

"She knows. She's seen every public report on you, and maybe a few that weren't public. Part of the reason we came to America was to see if we could meet you. Meet you! You saved me. Walking on air, and realizing that I was leaking. Even the way you were announced. 'The Outrageous Ambassador' indeed. NOBODY would dare such a thing at a formal gathering. And you carried it off." Taylor finally wound down.

"I'm outrageous because it's fun," she said. "I'm 'tweaking the nose of the man'. I'm telling the world that it's too serious and needs to loosen up. I'm giving them a reason to laugh with me at all the hopelessness, a defiance in the face of adversity. I'm telling them without words that life is ridiculous and the only defense is to be ridiculous back. It isn't something that you plan or think about or learn. It's something you do. You had a piece of it, today, using your own cultural stereotypes to mock the situation."

"Yea, but then I got serious."

"So? You should have seen some of the times I got serious. I shanghaied a President and rubbed his nose in the fact that I was being shot at by the head of one of his departments. How much more serious can one get? Well, it looks like we're done here," Muriel said. "How about we let your crew do what they need to do and we'll take your catch back to be evaluated. I don't think you'll have to throw him back for being too small."

# Chapter 31

## Royalty

(Tuesday morning, later)

Translating Herzog to the crown court was simple. A statement from Taylor, and he was charged with numerous crimes. His possessions had been translated to a cubical in a warehouse in Enclave, and all the computers and records from the school had been deposited with the court. The mass of Envoys had stayed at the school-no-longer to destroy the buildings and build the new Enclave under the direction of Saul. The Envoys that had translated the materials from the school to the court had gone back to the American Enclave.

Taylor and Muriel, and their squads, now waited outside the throne room. "Look," Taylor said, "I'll go in first – I have to report on what happened and how it was done, anyway. The usher will call you. Just be yourself. If it means being outrageous, then so be it."

"That's the third time, Taylor."

"Oh. Sorry. It's just that she NEVER uses this room. And to get a court in here on short notice . . . ."

"Taylor, you'll be fine. If anything, I'm the one that should worry. I've never dealt with royalty before."

"You dealt with me!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, that. You were just a boy in distress. That was easy." Taylor just looked at her for a moment, then busted up laughing.

"OK, I've been put in my place. In other words, you're going to treat her like a real person instead of the Queen."

"Yep. I don't see any reason to do otherwise. If she's sensitive about rank and privilege, then she needs to reflect on the fact that someone who represents a place larger than this whole world, and more populated, doesn't worry about such things," she said. "Relax. You know her better than I do. And, whatever I do it does NOT reflect on you. I'm known to be outrageous. SHE knows it. If she didn't want to put up with it, then she shouldn't have invited me."

"Your Highness," an usher said, "the Queen will see you now. And she requests that you have your friend come, too."

To Taylor's puzzled look, Muriel said, "Well, there go all your plans," and snickered.

"Your Majesty, His Royal Highness, Taylor, Prince of the Realm and Colonel of the

Home Regiment, and his associate Muriel, THE Leader of Home, Chancellor of the University of Home, Marshal of the Forces of Home and Ambassador to earth,” the usher's voice rang out.

Then it was the long walk down the length of the room. Taylor, his nerves still somewhat in evidence, stepped right out, and his squad matched him. Muriel, still in formal wear, followed at an easy pace, her fly plaid doing it's job of waving like a flag behind her. Mata followed, just far enough back to keep from getting hit in the face by it. And the squad followed her. Muriel could hear gasps behind her, as the crowd caught sight of her squad of 'children', and figured that that was outrageous enough.

As they reached the dais, the Queen greeted Taylor. He related what had been done, and the queen congratulated him on dealing with the school. Then he introduced Muriel simply as the one that had trained him.

“Ambassador . . . ,” began the Queen.

“Hi, Your Majesty. Just Muriel, please. I only drag out the titles when I'm about to put someone down,” Muriel interrupted. The crowd gasped, and the Queen looked confused for a second, then smiled.

“I see what Taylor means by outrageous. You don't deal well with formality, do you? Are you really all those things?”

“Oh, I can deal with it quite well, Your Majesty. But if I have to be formal then somebody is trying to be a bully. And when it reaches that point the gloves come off, and I don't fight fair. Nope. Formality gets in the way of people being people. It hides things and tries to make enemies out of people that could be friends,” Muriel said.

“You know, Taylor, I think I begin to understand your friend. And her outrageousness.”

“I don't want to know what's going on behind me, do I?” Muriel asked the Queen.

“Perhaps not. But I'd surely like to know HOW it's happening.”

Muriel turned around and looked, then turned back. “I was right. I didn't want to know. I'm sorry, Your Majesty. My squad appears to be acting younger than their years. MUCH younger. They're Envoys, and they're showing off – switching from one uniform to another, and out of sync with each other just to show that they can do it. And, if they don't straighten out and get into Class 'A's' immediately we WILL have words.”

There was a sudden gasp from the assembled people, then a chuckle. “MUCH better. Now, behave yourselves instead of behaving like me.”

“How . . . ?”

“Oh, it's part of the training. Taylor and I, and his squad had to learn how to do it. With

them, it comes naturally – it's part of what they are. My squad are Envoys. Taylor's is human, as you and I are human."

"You mean, you can do that, too?" Asked the Queen.

"Of course," Muriel said, and ran through the various uniforms and permutations of uniforms, then back to the formal wear she'd started with. "It's just a matter of remembering what your clothing looked like, and deciding what outfit you want to wear, and telling it to appear."

"Oh . . . . Of course . . . ."

"You look confused, Your Majesty."

"You take this ability so casually," the Queen replied.

"Oh, no. Not really. Especially not when I'm teaching someone how to do the things we do. But I do it so often, now, that it's second nature to me."

"Taylor?"

"I'm not as good at it, Your Majesty. I can change quickly enough. It's just that I haven't set up the number of clothes that Muriel has." And he promptly change into three sets of clothing he knew, then back to formal

"I understand that your Enclave has a University. Does it do any lower level schooling?"

"Of course, Your Majesty. My friends and I have all been through that. And we're reaching out to the community around us, too."

"And what do you charge for tuition?" asked the Queen.

"That depends, Your Majesty. Anyone completing the Envoy training can get whatever level of education he or she wants for free. Those who can only pass the basic test pay . . . I believe it's one hundred dollars a course."

"That sounds a bit expensive."

"Not really, especially when compared to seven years of school in a standard university. Oh, I see what the problem is. In a standard school, a course would be like history, math, art history, stuff like that. No, the University of Home classifies a course as that which fulfills a discipline to the doctorate level."

"One hundred dollars for a complete doctorate? What about room and board, books, lab fees, all the other add-ons."



"We don't have them. Courses are administered by the mental link between the tutor and the student. Takes about five minutes, and opens up in about two days, though I understand that that's been improved on, lately."

"Then you could get my grandson through high school?"

"Easily. Plus, what is it, now, Taylor? Two or three courses?" Muriel asked.

"Two now. I'll probably stop at that, though, for a while, until I see what direction I need next," he replied.

"Wait a minute, you mean to say that you have two doctorates?" asked the Queen.

"Yes, well they haven't opened up yet. The high school one has opened up, though. The other two should open up in a day or so. My tutor's been pushing me kinda hard."

"And they work?"

"Your Majesty, a little while ago a friend of mine took the medical course. She followed the Envoy doctor around for a while, mostly doing simple things. Then, one day, as a man entered my office, he had a heart attack. His heart stopped. My friend showed up with two support Envoy doctors – part of her squad. She worked on the man's heart while one of the Envoys kept the blood circulating and the other cleared out the arteries. The man was sitting up after five minutes of having no heartbeat. He was walking within a half hour. The next day he was strong enough to take the training. It works, and we have a record of the operation. I might add, it was the first time she'd done a major procedure like that. She'd never even seen it before."

"Your grandson has a 'battlefield first aid' course that's meant for wounds and such," Muriel added. "I have the same course. I worked on a patient at an accident scene that shouldn't have lived. The only reason she went to a hospital is that I didn't have the five minutes extra to heal even the bruises. But the life-threatening injuries were all dealt with. You don't think about it when you do it. You see a situation and it just kicks in. You KNOW what to do."

"And Envoys. How do they play in this?"

"Your Majesty, Envoy means 'messenger'. Well, they are that and a whole lot more. They are not only the messenger, but the message. But there are things that they lack. They don't have judgment because, for the most part, they don't have the experience to base a judgment on. They also aren't creative, for the most part. Their society and culture, if you can call it that, is static. Or was. Humans have creativity. Humans also have judgment. It's built into them. Originally, I was trained in the Envoy techniques – the message that the Envoys are – mostly to see if it could be done. Then I ended up teaching them. I found better ways of doing some things, and new ways of doing others. Nations survive because of their interrelationship with each other. And the commerce between them is just that, commercial – money. Envoys don't have the need for money. But they do have the need for growth. The

exchange between Envoys and humans is in knowledge and ability.”

“And, it's working.” Muriel added. “Envoys are learning. Maybe for the first time in centuries. And all it costs them is a little time and effort in teaching. My first title was Ambassador of Training. And now, your grandson, Taylor, will be doing some of that, himself. Or at least overseeing it. But he'll be doing other things, too. What, I don't know. A lot depends on how he fits in YOUR society, and what its needs are. What you've given him is the ability to begin that work, the means to achieve his own place halfway between Envoys and Humans, and a part of both. The little green booklet he has, his passport from Home, simply means that the Envoys acknowledge that he can come and go in Home whenever he wants. He owes no allegiance to it. But, by the same token, he'll see and understand more of the Envoy point of view as he goes along, just as he'll see and understand more of your society as he grows.”

“Eventually,” Muriel concluded, “there will be others. Other Enclaves, Other leaders in those enclaves. Ambassadors bridging the gap between the two separate people and benefiting both.”

“And you see this as a good thing?” asked the Queen.

“Yes. I do. I've seen what excessive greed can do to a society. I've seen what excessive need to have and use power can do to a society. I've spent some time in having to research ways in which greed and power have affected the society and cleaning up the mess that those factions left behind so that the society didn't destroy itself. So, am I looking for a utopia? I don't know. But I AM looking for something better. Is that wrong?”

“No . . . ,” The Queen said. “No, not wrong. Just . . . different. I was taught that formality was the way people could meet and converse without friction.”

“I would say that being polite is the way to do that,” Muriel said. “But with so many different ways of being formal, one person has to conform to the formality of the other. That, right there, is an admission of defeat, Your Majesty. It's saying 'I'll knuckle under to you rather than cooperate with you'. When you demand that someone conforms to your formality you're saying 'I'm going to take and you're going to give.' I don't feel that that's right. I think it's better to meet as equals, respecting the other person and working toward real friendship from the start, not causing each other to have to try to jump over hurdles.”

“Yet, there are cultures that demand we conform to their formality in discussions,” the Queen said.

“Would you care to say how negotiations work out between you and them? Would you say that you get fair dealing from them? Or do they get the better of you, consistently, because what YOU ask for isn't their way? No,” Muriel said, “don't bother answering. I already know the answer as well as you do. They win concessions, and when you balk, they make threats. They're bullies, Your Majesty. Bullies that need to be slapped down and told to straighten out.”

“And how would you do that?”

“The same way I already have, Your Majesty. I'd stop them. I'd either show them that they were wrong, as I've done with one religious sect, or have them arrested for criminal charges, as I've done on numerous occasions, and your grandson has just done. I'd stop them. And if all else failed, I DO have more power than they do, as one country found out when it tried to take an American Embassy and Enclave was asked to rescue the workers.”

“You took Envoys into another country to defeat them?”

“No, Your Majesty. I took my friends. Twelve human children. They accomplished the rescue. I defended them and, when fired upon, removed the ability of the aggressors to reproduce or bear arms.” That brought a gasp from the crowd. “They were left alive. They didn't stay that way. What I did to them caused them to be considered outcasts by that culture. Their own people killed them. Then the people turned on the government. Their end wasn't so pleasant, I understand. Your Majesty, I am not a nice person when somebody tries to bully me. I've put down ministers, businessmen, media moguls, petty scammers and politicians, and the President of the United States. The last is the only one of that list that ended up taking the Envoy training. I'm not an easy person to get to know. I don't demand formality. I demand politeness, and I return the same. I've taken enemies and made friends of them. I respect them and they respect me. But that's the key. Politeness and respect. Not formality.”

“And now, I've upset your court,” Muriel said. “For that, I apologize to you and to your court. That isn't what I'm here to do. I'm here to lend my support to His Royal Highness, Prince Taylor, who also happens to be my friend. And I'm here to congratulate you on placing him in a position of responsibility in which he can grow, as Colonel of the Regiment of Home – the first fully Envoy trained regiment in the world. And I'm here to be outrageous – to be a clown – so that you don't see the seriousness with which I take these proceedings and life, itself. In that last, I've failed. I ask your forgiveness.”

“Actually, I'd say you were successful,” the Queen said. “You are outrageous, even when you're serious. Your handling of the Embassy situation shows that. You left them alive, and left it up to their own culture as to what happened to them. And now I understand the red stripe on your plaid, and the red hose. You did what you needed to do, and need no forgiveness from me or my people for having told us.

“And now, as a result, I will say that you are welcome in this country whenever you care to visit. In token of which we would like to offer this diplomatic passport and credentials,” an official came and handed them to Muriel, “designating you as Ambassador from this country to the People of Home.”

“Your Majesty, thank you,” Muriel said, and nodded once – the 'equals' nod of respect. “Likewise you and your entourage are welcome in Enclave in America, as our guests, whenever you wish. Transportation can even be provided, as well as a place to stay for as long as you choose.”

“Wouldn't that entail my having to arrange entrance to the United States?”

“No, we'd translate you directly to Enclave. There's no customs inspection in and out of Enclave. And, due to the treaty we have with the United States, you would truly be entering a foreign country. We are not subject to the country's laws inside Enclave. Outside, we try to behave ourselves. But inside, the only rules are those of the Leaders of Home.”

“In other words, you,” the Queen said, and laughed.

“Yes, Your Majesty. As administered by the Ambassadors of Home.”

“You again! Oh, this is delightful. Taylor? Is this why you wanted me to meet her?”

“Yes, Your Majesty. With all due respect, they suggested that our Enclave treaty be modeled after theirs,” Taylor said.

“Then consider it done, Taylor. Oh, we may have to hash out a few details – I haven't seen theirs yet – but I don't see that as an obstacle as much as an acknowledgment of whatever differences there are between the two countries. And no, I won't browbeat my grandson over this. If there are changes, I'd like to take the matter up with you and whoever you feel would be best, if that's all right.”

“Perfectly, Your Majesty. The appropriate person would probably be Ted, since he fashioned the original and its amendments. And either here or in the Embassy in America, as you wish.”

“Done, then. I will excuse the court, now, as the important work has been finished, and the rest is just casual between friends.” Muriel didn't turn around, but distinctly heard the gentle rustle of people leaving the hall.

# Chapter 32

## Peregrination

(Tuesday, late morning)

Getting prepared took much longer than the actual translation to Enclave. The Queen and her husband changed out of formal wear and into traveling clothes, and their guards were selected. The Queen also had to notify her secretary of her pending absence and expected return. The translation, itself, was a training exercise for Taylor, learning how to create an inertia-less shield around those who didn't know how to translate, and drawing enough power to keep the shield strong and attached to him. But the actual translation to the front of Muriel's office went flawlessly. It was afterward that Muriel informed the Queen that Taylor had performed the translation of the Queen and her party, and that it had been a training exercise for him. He'd never done it before.

"You're kidding!" said the Queen. "And you trusted him to do it?"

"I was paralleling him the whole way through the exercise, and made sure that all the points were covered. Most of it was things he'd already learned and practiced, and knew how to do. The only difference was the fact that you and your party weren't people that could translate yourselves, so he had to account for that and provide the means. Simple, really," Muriel said.

"I can see why you're in charge of training, then."

"The hard part of the training is actually the first stripe – learning how to make the mental link, draw power, and create shields. After that, things get much easier and a lot more fun," Muriel said.

"Muriel," Mata said, "You take the royalty and head guards. I'll take the other guards with me. Especially since there are three that need to be finished up. OK?"

"Fine with me. Taylor, do you mind if Mata finishes their training?" asked Muriel.

"No, I don't mind, but I wouldn't want to put her out," he replied.

"No problem there. We'll also make sure they get lunch, and give them a chance to see Enclave a bit," Mata said, collecting the various guards and heading for the kitchen in Muriel's office. Muriel and Taylor escorted his parents to the casual area of her office, and were joined, shortly, by Ted.

After introductions, Ted said, "Taylor, did you happen to show Her Majesty the copy of the Treaty we have with America?"

"Nope. Never had the chance. But that's easily remedied," he said, pulling it out of a

'no pocket' and handing it to the Queen. She studied it for a few minutes, then handed it to her husband to look at.

"That is an interesting document," she said. "Taylor, did you get a chance to read it?"

"Yes, ma'am. Twice. Once as Prince and once as Ambassador. It is extraordinary. But I think it's fair."

"Well, to change the subject for a bit, may I ask where you got this furniture? It's comfortable without being overwhelming. Something like this in our private area of the castle would definitely be good," the Queen said.

"The Envoys made it. To be precise, my squads did, when they created my office out of an unused warehouse," Muriel replied.

"Really! Remarkable. You don't suppose they could do something like this for me, could they? Or does it take someone with training to maintain it?"

"Oh, I'm sure that the Envoys from Taylor's Enclave would be able to do something like this. To your taste, of course. It doesn't have to look like this. Or, one of my friends could suggest possible styles for you. She's an interior decorator, among other things," Muriel replied.

"I'd love to meet your friend. She's trained?" asked the Queen.

"Oh, of course. When I came here, originally, I was out of contact with my friends for a couple of days. So I made it up to them by bringing them all here and giving them an idea of what I'd been up to. The result was that I ended up training all twelve of them at once. With a lot of help, of course. But they were my first. Taylor's met one or two of them already," Muriel said.

"I'd say, as doing something for guests, and as a favor to relatives of Taylor, we could waive any cost involved. Say, a token to show our friendship and esteem for you and your country," Ted said. "We take guest status very seriously, here."

The Queen's husband handed back the document, and quietly nodded. "This," said the Queen, "is a most remarkable document. Basically, it would give Taylor the ability to do whatever he wants inside Enclave, cutting it off completely from the rest of the country. Yet, at the same time making it wide open to anyone of peaceful intent to see and enjoy. And, in exchange, you offer some services free, like the disaster relief and assistance. It would be the first time that so large an area was considered an Embassy, of course. Is there a reason for that?"

"As here," Ted said, "the whole of Enclave would be Taylor's home, if you will. It's main purpose would be to support him in his mission, which is to introduce people to Envoys and the things that Envoys and those trained in their techniques can do. It's somewhat self-serving, in that by doing so we hope to recruit more people to take the training. And no,

outside those that Taylor specifically trains to be a part of the Enclave, such as the regiment, they wouldn't be attached to Enclave. Even the regiment would actually belong to your country, but would also be Taylor's responsibility, which is the connection they'd have to the Enclave. This can be written into the document, if you like."

"I think, with regard to the regiment, it should be. Not because I don't trust you, but because I don't trust any politicians getting hold of the Treaty and trying to make something dire and dastardly out of it. Taylor? What do you think?" she asked.

"I think that there needs to be some give and take on that regard. As I've envisioned the regiment, they would all have to pass the training, fully, to be members of it. And, as such, they'd all be officers of one rank or another. Fighting officers, if you will, which is why the first of them are coming from the ranks rather than the officer's corps," he replied. "There will be times when they will be acting on behalf of Home and the Enclave. And others when they will be acting on behalf of the realm. That's what needs to be in there."

"Two masters? Impossible," said the Queen.

"One master," Taylor replied. "But one that you might not understand. The men – and women, this will not be a segregated force – MUST pass the whole training. The master they will serve is themselves, the balance within them. I will tell you, because you won't see it for yourselves during your life," he added. "The purpose of the trip to Home is two-fold. First, the accomplishment of reaching another dimension and returning, alive. The second, though, is more important. Judgment. When you go to Home you are judged by the harshest judge of all. Yourself. And it is there that you learn to understand what the Balance is. Each wrong you've done and not tried to right is held against you by your own conscience, and can cause such grief."

"The risk I take," and he emphasized the pronoun, "is that every person I send stands the chance of not returning – of being so consumed by grief that he, or she, dies there. It is the task of the trainers to only allow those capable of taking that final test and passing it of being trained at all. That is what I am learning from the Envoys, now. How to make that selection, and not be swayed by pleas. Muriel is a better trainer than you know. She instinctively knows who can pass the final test – who is balanced enough to survive it. Even so, she was also lucky. She had the support of Mata and her squads to ensure that they could pass the final test."

"And that," he said, with a lighter voice, "is the reason they will all be officers," he said, raising his eyes to his grandmother, determination radiating from him.

The Queen met his gaze and held it for long minutes. Then turned to Ted and said, "That is the way it will be. I'll trust my grandson in this matter. And Taylor," she said, turning back to him, "your warrant will be rewritten to reflect what you've told me, or at least enough of what you told me to allow you free rein. You are different, grandson. I know you, and yet I don't. But I think I like the new you as much as I liked the old."

"Bart," Ted said and sent.

"Sir," he replied, appearing at the edge of the casual area.

"How long to prepare the document in two copies?" he asked, then turned to the Queen. "Or should it be three?"

"Two should be enough. One for you, to be kept in Taylor's possession, I think. And the other for me to show to my advisers, council, and the politicians," she said.

"Very good, sir. A moment, please," Bart said. Then from a 'no pocket' drew two parchments. "Will Your Majesty need a stamp pad, or melted wax?"

"Wax?" she asked. "You can do that?"

"Your Majesty," Bart replied, "It will look like wax and take an impression like wax. But when you lift the seal it will harden and bond to the parchment, permanently. In addition, for protection, when they are signed they will be placed in a frame in such a way that they cannot be defaced."

"Oh, my," said the Queen. "Well . . . I think I'll have to make due with a wafer seal, since what I have with me is an embossing stamp."

"Very good, Your Majesty. We will provide gold ones for you, with ribbons in your flag colors."

"What's all this?" said Taylor's father, as he and his wife entered the area.

"Oh, hello, father. Come to witness the signing?" asked Taylor.

Taylor's father walked over to the table and read the Treaty, and his eyebrows went up. "This is unprecedented. The entire Enclave is the Embassy?"

"That's the way it is, here, Your Highness," Ted said. "It solves a number of possible problems. And this country has numerous areas that are reservations that have the same sort of sovereignty."

"We'll need to co-sign for our son, since he's underage," the Prince said.

"Oh, that won't be necessary, since he's signing on behalf of Home, as our Ambassador. You're more than welcome to add your signatures as witnesses to the signing, just as Muriel and I will," Ted said.

"Well, son . . . it would seem that you're growing up. Will you be coming home at all?" his father asked.

"Oh, yes. Of course. I was away at school for three quarters of the year, anyway. So, in that sense it won't be much different. The big difference is that you will be able to visit me



whenever you like, which you couldn't do when the school was in existence," Taylor said. "And, of course, as circumstances permit, I'll be able to come home and visit you."

"You really want this, don't you."

"Yes," Taylor said, emphatically. "Yes, father, I do."

"Your Majesty?"

"It would please us to have you witness our signature on this historic occasion," the Queen replied. The Prince nodded.

Bart produced pens for each of them, and in a short time the documents were signed. When both were signed, Bart mounted them in 'glass fronted' frames – actually shields that would protect the documents from any damage – and displayed them to the principals. Then one copy was sent to Saul at the new Enclave, and the other was mounted on a stand and sent to the House of Lords, at the base of the Queen's dais where it was sure to cause considerable consternation.

After that, it was a matter of deciding on whether to have lunch at a restaurant in Enclave or in private in Muriel's apartment. Bart collected menus from the various restaurants and said that with these they could remain private and still sample the abilities of the Envoys. The Queen decided that it would be best to remain private, and Chuck and company scrambled to make Muriel's apartment into a virtual party house for the occasion. Food was brought in, and the company was translated up and seated.

"I've got to ask," said the Queen, "I see so many children around, yet you say that they are Envoys. Do Envoys have children?"

"No, Your Majesty, they simply appear like children," Muriel said. "Originally, it was done to keep from overwhelming me with 'adults', and allow me to feel that I was in charge. Now, it's done for effect more than anything. When I go somewhere followed by what appear to be a bunch of kids as a security squad it tends to make me look harmless. It can then come as a shock to those people when they try to take advantage of me or of them."

"Well, it certainly worked with my court," the Queen said. "But you also said that you trained your friends from school. Are they children, too?"

"Yes. There were a bunch of us that were constantly being picked on by bullies. We lost some over a couple of years, one way or another. But what was left – twelve of them – ended up here to see where I was working. Then I trained them, to the consternation of both Ted and the Federal Government that then had to acknowledge them as Ambassadors. I've trained adults since then, but that still seems to have been the defining moment for me."

"You've set up my grandson with a human security force," the Queen said, as a leading question.

“Yes, Your Majesty, because he already had human guards, and one of them took the training with him,” Muriel said. “I didn't have that option. Oh, we've trained Secret Service and FBI officers, and later members of all five of our various military forces, but all of them are engaged outside of Enclave and don't have the connection that Taylor's regiment will have to him. Oh, he can also have Envoy security – his choice, really – but Envoys can't kill except in extremely prescribed instances. They would be useless in fighting a war, though they'd be as indispensable as trained humans in acting in defense. It's difficult to fight what you can't even hit.”

“OH! . . . Oh, I hadn't thought of that. The shields. Are they really that good?”

“Well, when mine were being tested one squad shot at me. The bullets stopped one foot from me and never rocked me,” Muriel said. “I've been shot at since then, stopped an RPG, and my friends stopped five missiles with the engines still running just after being trained. I've also been shot at with military rifles, tanks, and had a chain bomb wrapped around me. Yea, I'd say they were effective. The Secret Service officer I trained has a reputation that rivals the RCMP. One riot and her, the riot doesn't stand a chance.”

“And she trains others?”

“Her first day back, she had her detail chief arrested. Originally it was for sexual harassment in the workplace. But then he drew on her in front of their supervisor. She ended up training the entire detail and becoming the head of it. Then she trained the President. The FBI agents have trained others. And I just got through handing out passports and congratulations to members of the Navy, Coast Guard and Marine Corps. It's accelerating. And then there's the civilians that have been trained. That's the thing about the training,” Muriel said, “It wants to be out there. And it gives those trained a definite advantage.”

“It also tends to make them grow up in a hurry,” Ted said. “Though, from what I've seen, not to their detriment. Muriel is still a kid. So are her friends. It's just that they're kids that are capable of doing responsible things and knowing when that's needed.”

The rest of a pleasant afternoon was spent showing the royalty around Enclave and introducing them to various 'influential' Envoys like the manager of Guest House and 'doctor' Mark. They also had an opportunity to meet Muriel's friends and understand just how mature these children could be. Her friends offices impressed the Queen with their self-sufficiency as well as the variety of decor that was in line with both the child's personality and chosen profession.

Meanwhile, the two squads found themselves busier for the afternoon than they had expected. Taylor's squad, of course, were initially engaged in getting three members past their trip to Home, and educated sufficiently to attain the rank of lieutenant. Right after that, they were treated to lunch, then taught the new uniforms and whatever tricks with shields one of Muriel's squad could manage to teach them.

The Queen's squad, on the other hand, were treated to a walk around Enclave, seeing sights and sampling food as they went and visiting parts of Enclave that visitors normally

never saw, like maintenance section and the power converter. The tour gave them a better idea of just what was involved in the creation of an Enclave, and some of the potential problems with maintaining one. Security was brought up, and the Envoys demonstrated how shields could be used to protect an individual, a group, or an entire area at need. The afternoon also gave them a better idea of what it was like to be one of Muriel's security squads, and why they all had skills beyond those necessary for security – the excessive down times and lack of need for sleep needing to be filled with other activities.

The two squads ended up taking away with them a much better appreciation of what it meant to be an Envoy, and how hard they actually worked. They also had a warm friendship with individual Envoys which colored their thinking about all Envoys. And finally they had knowledge that they didn't have before of how an Enclave was run and why it was so wide open. It was just after mid-afternoon when the Queen felt she should get back to her regular job, and Taylor felt he should put in an appearance at the new Enclave.

# Chapter 33

## The New Enclave

(Wednesday morning)

Taylor got back to the new Enclave to find that the outer walls were up and the driveway and parking lot were already paved. A sheet of paving stones was laid down, providing a grid on which to build the buildings, and marks were made to show what buildings would go where. Only two buildings were currently finished – the main Embassy offices and Taylor's apartment, and one barracks.

Like the Enclave in America, there would not be any vehicles inside the wall except those belonging to the Enclave. Unlike America, there would be no houses inside the wall. Consideration was made for the possibility of housing employees, and there was certainly enough land to do so, but such would follow the old 'castle and town' format of most of Europe during earlier periods. This allowed the basic Enclave to remain the same, while a town would spring up outside it using architecture that mimicked the middle ages but was better built and safer and more comfortable.

From the outside, the main Embassy offices looked like a castle keep – rectangular with crenelated guard wall at the top, and towers at each of the corners. It was three stories tall, the second story being Taylor's apartment, the third story being for use of whatever squad was on duty as security. On the main floor Taylor's office was just inside the door on the left. It included space for Saul and whatever squad he needed to support his educational and analytical functions as well as kitchen and extensive casual area. Thematically it was military but comfortable.

Two other offices, still unstaffed and on the other side of a central hall, were set up for solicitors and barristers, and for a holding company. Quests were already going out to fill the lawyers office. The stipulation was that they must be able to pass a basic test. It was Taylor's intention to have them all trained, and as quickly as possible, once they were hired on probation. The holding company would wait until he had a better idea of investment possibilities and the knowledge of what Ted had done to capture six companies at once.

Well, that's what it looked like when Taylor went to bed. The next morning he found that all the barracks were finished, enough to hold a full company of troops, as was the administration and dining hall building for the company. On the other side of the central avenue shops were beginning to take shape. Some of them had nothing at all to do with normal modern military life, such as the blacksmith, chandlery and general store, and armorer. However, it was in keeping with the theme of the Enclave, and Taylor just grinned to think of the kids wanting to come see it and purchase things at these shops. There was a street of restaurants – thematic, of course – as well as places to buy linens, flatware and dishes, and costumes.

Some houses were planned, for outside the 'gate' in the curtain wall, to be nothing

more than show pieces – examples of what homes were like in the middle ages. One other important building that would be outside was the school. Taking a tip from the American Enclave, Taylor planned to have students that could pass the basic test invited in for schooling. He'd already started feeling out the local school system as well as the national administrators for permission to open it. So far, the idea was met with approval, but more details were necessary to complete the work. This would not be a boarding school, but a day school. Students would go home when the day was over.

Taylor found his father sitting in his casual area when he came down to his office. "Have you had breakfast?" Taylor asked.

"Oh, yes," his father said. "I was going to chide you on getting up late, until Saul told me how late you were up last night, going over what was built and what needed to be finished, and other matters. Then I stopped to ask him just what you had studied, and I was impressed. Military tactics, strategy and history, and officer behavior was a good start. But then he told me that you also took civilian management of large scale organizations, and I realized what you'd been doing so late. Impressive," he added, with a grin.

"I won't take complete credit for it. Saul recommended them as a start. I'll see where I go from here, but they do make it easier," Taylor said.

"So . . . where'd you get this coffee? It's the best I've ever had!" his father asked.

"Home. Saul has it shipped in for the squad and me. And for any guests. Talk to him and he'll set it up for you, complete with checks to be sure you aren't running out or have too much," Taylor said. "You do realize that you could have a squad of Envoys available to you to take care of the petty details, don't you?"

"But where would I put them?" his father asked.

"You've got the land. Build an office, and include a kitchen and break room, like Muriel had. Envoys don't sleep. But Muriel found that they work better with some down time. And they're efficient and don't cost anything."

"Hmm. I'll think about it. I do have another question that might be prying a bit, son. How are you paying for all this?"

"Good question. Easy answer, I'm not. The Enclave is being paid for, if you want to call it that, by Home. They bought the land and paid the taxes. I just had to do the footwork on it. The regiment is actually being paid for both by the Crown and Home. No problem there, as it will have a dual function. And no problem with divided loyalties. I asked before I accepted the position. The salaries are covered by the Crown, while upkeep and maintenance are covered by Home. That means that buildings, any administration not covered at the company level or by me, and training and education are done by Envoys. That's the military side. Now, the Ambassador side, lawyers and holding company and such, are covered by Home as part of Enclave. And the shops and stuff are all being run by Envoys. We may have civilian employees as income from that side picks up, but until then it'll

all be Envoys.”

“Good answer. And good planning. You do it?” his father asked.

“Most of it, with some help. Ted gave me a crash course in what it was like to set up an Enclave and keep it running. Theirs is ALL paid for by Home. Saul has helped me keep some of the things I need to think about straight, while allowing my ideas to find a way to work. You noticed that this is something like a theme park.”

“As a matter of fact, no. But I'll take your word for it.”

“It's intentional,” Taylor said. “It provides people with a glimpse of what past military life was like, complete with souvenirs they can take home, and even education on facets of that life. It also provides a basic income to keep that side of it going, through modest admission fees and housing fees, as well as the cost of the various trinkets and such. That's for visitors. Guests, like you, get what they want, free. Same as in America. It encourages people to take the training.”

“Define modest,” his father said.

“Oh, say a family of four for three days, including a suite of rooms, food, medical as necessary, and what Muriel calls 'hot and cold running Envoys' – in American currency would be sixty dollars. Day pass for the same family would be, say, ten dollars. We're not out to bleed them. We're out to give them an experience they won't forget. We've got specials lined up for weddings and business conferences, which would actually be held outside the walls in a special building but include admission to the inside area. All sorts of things are planned.”

“You may need a bigger walled area at the rate you're going,” his father said.

“Nope. A bigger town. But we've got the room to build it. That's why we kept the core area small. Well, one of the reasons,” Taylor said.

“What about recruitment? How are you handling that?”

“That's a stickler,” Taylor said. “We can't keep poaching on the other services. Oh, they'll let us bleed them of some of their people. Especially those they think are a problem,” he said, with an ironic smile. “But, as yet, I don't see how to get the word out.”

“Advertising. Let me see what I can come up with. I won't do anything without your approval, of course,” his father said. “But there may be some methods we can use. As long as you don't mind having women in the regiment.”

“Nice feeler, dad, but I'm not biting. You already know my feelings about having women in the regiment. NO segregation. Oh, they'll have separate rooms and such. That's not what I mean. Anyone coming into the regiment takes the same risks and gets the same benefits. With the training, physical muscle power just doesn't count any more. Women aren't going to be relegated to administrative or support positions. They'd be active right from

the start. I know that Her Majesty calls it a regiment. But I doubt that we'll ever get to be more than one thousand people, total. Maybe I'm wrong, but I don't think so."

"Well," his father said, "with the economy down, and people out of work, you may have more volunteers than you know what to do with."

"They'd still have to be able to take the training. And accept the military discipline. And that's going to weed out a lot of people," Taylor said. "Hmm. What's this? Excuse me, dad. I'll be right back."

Taylor walked out to the front of the administration building. "Good morning, what can I do for you?" he said, addressing a group of about twenty people.

"We heard that there was something new going in here, and wanted to find out about it," one of them said.

"Well, as you can see, we're still in the process of getting set up. We won't be open for business for a week or so," Taylor said.

"So, what is all this?"

"Two things, really. First is that it's an Embassy for the nation called Home. And part of the compound will be devoted to giving people a chance to meet Envoys while having some fun. Kind of like a theme park. But the other side is that a new military regiment is being started up, and one company of it would be housed here to act as support for the Embassy," Taylor said. "So, if you come back in a couple of weeks, you'll be able to see some of what it's all about."

"Look," said the one that seemed to be acting as spokesperson, "I'll lay it on the line. We've been out of work for a while now. Just can't get hired. At this point I'd even join the military, just to get an income. Is there someone we can talk to? Someone in charge?" At that point, Taylor's father stepped into view. "Oh, geez. It's the Prince. Sir, are you in charge, here?"

"Me?" said Taylor's father. "Oh, no. That would be the Ambassador from Home and regimental colonel. I'm just visiting my son."

"So, who's this Ambassador?"

"I am," said Taylor. "Also Colonel of the regiment." The shock on the young man's face was astounding to Taylor, so he covered it by turning to his father and saying, "You know, dad, we probably should have a Colonel-in-chief. Would you like the position?"

"Nope. I have enough to do. Besides, you're royal. You can act in both capacities. Unusual, I'll admit," his father said, "but I think Her Majesty would go for it. She'd probably laugh, but she'd go for it. It's already an unusual regiment, so you might as well do things in an unusual manner. Besides, if things get sticky, you can always call on Muriel to liven things

to make things more interesting. You and she did well at court, yesterday.”

“Well,” said Taylor, turning back to the small crowd and gathering himself, “well, if any of you are interested in joining the regiment, there is a small test that you'd have to pass, and training for a couple of days. Our expense, of course. Then you could decide if you want to join up. Oh, there is one thing. All the members of the regiment will be officers – lowest rank being lieutenant. Along with food, shelter, clothing and odd assignments, you also get education. Right off the bat, the equivalent of four years of military academy. After that, whatever interests you that we could use.”

“So, how come you pull this test and training before we enlist?” said the young man, finally recovering himself.

“Simple. The test and training are for Envoy techniques. They give you the ability to protect yourselves and others, and the ability to move from one place to another, quickly. Not everyone can pass the initial test. And those that do and go on to take the Envoy training may decide that they don't want to be part of a military organization after all. And to tell you the truth, I'd just as soon not have someone that didn't really want to be military,” Taylor said.

::Saul, can I pull you away from whatever you're doing? We've got some people that may be interested in getting trained and joining the regiment.::

A young woman, near the back, said, “so, how do we get this test and training.” And Saul translated in beside Taylor, causing some shock to the crowd.

“Saul is an Envoy. He's also the head of my education section. He can see to all that.” Saul stepped over to the side, and the young woman immediately headed for him followed by about half the rest.

“Can you do that? Pop in like that?” another one asked.

“What? Oh, you mean translating from one place to another? Sure. That's part of the training in Envoy techniques,” Taylor said. At which point most of the rest went to join Saul.

“I'll use the barracks day room, sir. Guest House isn't finished yet. And we'll run them through the dining room, first. Rooms in the first barracks are finished, and we can house them there for the training,” Saul said. “I'll bring in some other Envoys to help move them all through. We should be finished before lunch, sir, then they can figure out what they want to do.”

“Sounds good, Saul. Have fun,” Taylor said with a grin.

“Well I, for one, am not going to jump into something that I don't know anything about,” said one as Taylor turned back to the remaining people.

“Reasonable,” said Taylor, smiling pleasantly. “So, why don't you come on in my office, and we can talk about it?” He walked back into the building and turned left at his office, totally



ignoring whether he was being followed or not. His father followed him, past the reception desk manned by one of Taylor's squad, and stood to one side. The young people entered, slowly, eyes large at what appeared to be the opulence of the office.

As they took their seats with some trepidation, Taylor said, "It looks like we need a couple more chairs. Just a second." And created two new ones. And their eyes bugged out.

"How'd you do that?" one asked.

"Oh, that? That's nothing. I just decided we needed chairs there, and made them. It's something that a person with the Envoy training can do. Among a lot of other things. Go ahead, it's safe. It's not an illusion or anything. Actually it's made out of a shield, and made to look like leather – feel like it, too." His father didn't hesitate, but took the second chair and calmly relaxed. In a couple of seconds the last person also took a seat, looking like he expected it to collapse at any moment. When it didn't, he finally sat back.

"OK," Taylor said, "What is the test and what is the training. Well . . . the test is simple enough. It's to find out if you can make a mental link. That link is used throughout the training to teach, and more important to monitor what you do during training. The test is the ONLY thing you can fail. Pass that, and we'll find ways to help you through the rest. That's what the monitoring is for. And, once you've got it, you'll get enough practice until you're comfortable with the new skills."

"Now, the training. The first thing we do is help you find power. It's there, and available, and once you're connected you'll stay connected. Your own body will tell it when it needs more or less, or you can call up more for serious work. The next thing you learn is how to shield. Well, technically, how to make shields. Once you've got a personal shield that can withstand anything, then you won't have to make a new one. But the practice at making shields comes in handy for making things like chairs and such. Those shields, by the way, can withstand anything that can be thrown at them. The girl that taught me was tested by being shot by her own squad. I'm not that dramatic, and neither is she, any more."

"Then come clothes, and for that you women would have a different trainer. That's because the first thing you'd have to do is get undressed. Once you've made clothes you can change from one outfit to another without any embarrassment, like this," he said and stood up and cycled through a few outfits. That can be a lot of fun, by the way. Next is learning how to go from one place to another in zero time and without having to go through all the fiddly bits in between. Any place you can imagine, and that'll be explained better, later."

"The last part is taking a trip to where the Envoys come from. Home. It's as easy as translating here on earth, but is actually in another dimension. The kicker to that is that when you arrive you'll go through a judgment. No, it's not somebody judging you. It's you judging yourself. It's showing you how balanced you are – how willing you are to recognize when you've done something wrong and how willing you are to try to correct it if it's possible. That can change some people – oh, not personality or anything like that, just that they become more careful about making things right when they can," he said.

"Then it's back here, and get your stripes, like these," and Taylor pointed to the ones on his epaulettes, "and your passport from Home declaring you a Citizen of Home. That just means that you got there and came back under your own power and alive. OK? Any questions?"

"I do," said a woman. "What do you meant get there and come back alive?"

"Everybody goes Home. Those with training can go their whenever they want and alive. Most people, right now, have to wait until they die. But sooner or later everybody goes home."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Yep. Exactly. And now you understand why the training is valuable. And I think you can figure out why it's given away free, with no strings attached. There's an awful lot that can be done with the training and humans are, by and large, capable of doing it. Whether it's something we lost somewhere back in time, or something that the Envoys didn't have a chance to teach us before now, I don't know. But there's a way now, and they're very happy, even eager to teach anyone who can pass the first test."

"Now," Taylor went on, "as for joining the regiment. You have to be trained to join the regiment. BUT . . . you do NOT have to join the regiment to be trained. There's no 'gotcha' there. I'm looking for people that want to be protectors. It does mean that you'd be out on the sharp end at times, doing things that you might not like. But it also means that you'd be helping others. A lot. If you need or want further information as to that, we have records of THE Ambassador from Home and Leader of the people of Home that can show you just how sharp that end can be, and how she overcame the problems. By the way, she's younger than I am. She's twelve."

"So, now, the choice is up to you. If you like, my father and I can leave and let you discuss it among yourselves. But, really, the choice is up to each of you, individually. You have to decide if you want to even try."

"I'll try," said the woman who'd spoken up, before. "I'll want to know more about the regiment before I decide on that. But I'd like to be tested and take the training if I can." The others nodded in agreement.

# Chapter 34

## The Train to Everywhere

(Wednesday afternoon, Thursday)

“OK, let me see about getting some Envoys,” Taylor said.

“What about you? If you're in charge, shouldn't you know how to do things?” one of the men asked.

“I should. And, in fact, I do. But I'm not practiced at it enough to be comfortable. I'd still have an Envoy to monitor me, as I was monitoring you. But, if that's what you want, then I'll get an Envoy to monitor me and we'll go to work,” Taylor said.

“Get one for me, too, son,” said his father. “I could use the practice.”

“Wait a minute,” another man said, looking between the father and son. “I've seen you two before someplace. On TV. You were both at a party with the American President!”

“Oh, gad!” said another. “Do you realize who they are? I knew it was the Prince. But that's his son. We've been questioning Prince Taylor!”

“And now you know why I didn't bother with the title,” Taylor said. “It just got in the way. So, what's it to be, people. I'm still the same person that you asked very reasonable questions of. I haven't changed. Only your perception of me has changed. I don't want that perception to cause you to lose out on an opportunity.”

“Well, I'm for it,” the woman said. “I want to know if I can take the training, and if I can I want to get it.”

“OK, I told you what the purpose is,” Taylor said. “Now, according to the Envoys, I COULD force a link, but it would only be one way – me to you. That's not going to do you any good in the future. So, what I want you to do is make a link to me. And here's how we'll play the game. You see how far away I am. I'm out of your reach, unless you come over to me. You see where I'm sitting, how I'm looking at you. Now, close your eyes, and in your mind, bring yourself closer to me, touch my shoulder and say, 'hi'.”

The woman studied him, stared at him, then closed her eyes. In a moment her eyes flew open and she had a shocked look on her face. Then she broke out in a grin.

The nervous man next to Taylor's father turned and looked at him. Afraid to even speak to a Prince, he simply pointed to himself, then the Prince. Taylor's father smiled and nodded.

“Do it just the way my son said. Study me, see where I am, then close your eyes and

reach out with your mind. Touch my shoulder and say, 'hi'."

Still nervous, but determined, the young man did as he was told. When his eyes opened with the most amazed look on his face, he said, "I did it! And he said, 'Hi, to you, too. And you can be trained!'"

After that it was just a matter of a few minutes before they were all grinning at each other. "OK," Taylor said. "I'm going to call a break now for lunch. Partly because I'm hungry," and the group laughed, "and partly to give you a chance to decide if you want to go further. And whether you want me to stumble through it or have a professional, an Envoy train you."

As Taylor and his father led the group to the dining hall, the Prince said, "That was very well done. Especially at the end. I thought you'd lost the game when we were recognized. But between that one woman and your kidding manner, you pulled them through. You know they're going to pick you, now, don't you?"

"And you," Taylor said, quietly. "That one nervous fellow thinks you're a real person, now. So, I hope you don't have any plans for this afternoon."

"Nothing that can't be changed or broken. And your mother is already working on that for me. Son, I came out here thinking that I'd have to prop you up for a while, until you got your feet under you. I apologize for even thinking it. You have a very firm grasp on what's going on, and how to deal with it. Oh, I'll be here if you DO need me. We can't foresee everything. But I no longer worry that you aren't mature enough to handle this responsibility."

"Well, dad," Taylor said, "I'll admit that I've had help. Saul's been in the back of my mind, nudging me at times, last night and this morning. Plus having you here helped. I found that I was in competition with you, in a sense. I had to do it the way you would have, without being stiff and formal. Just being me. And that settled me down."

"Just watch out for that woman. I think she's aiming for a command of some sort," the Prince said.

"I know. And if she turns out the way I think she will, she'll get it," Taylor responded. "And it'll be a mixed crew. I may have her go talk to Muriel, some, too."

"You might ask her about that Secret Service officer she trained, too. She's having to handle a detail that's mostly men, and she manages it very well, from what I understand," his father said.

The dining hall was staffed by Envoys who didn't believe in having trainees or regimental members walking a tray line. The group was seated at four-place tables, two of the group joining the royals, and served from menus. The last of the main group moved out to finish their training, and the envoys moved tables and chairs back to allow room for Taylor's group to train right there, on the spot. Several of what had been servers joined to actually monitor the trainee's progress as Taylor and his father simply directed them in what to do.

Taylor was grinning like a little kid when the last of them managed to pass the shield's test, and his father's eyes sparkled with pleasure. Next was clothing, and true to his work the women were segregated with a female Envoy for that segment. Fifteen minutes later, or so, the curtain came down and all the trainees were wearing duplicates of the clothes they'd come in. And they all had suitcases holding the clothes they had been wearing, marked with the Home logo.

Then it was on to teaching them how to translate. Several vacant shops were selected as targets, as well as the front of the administration building that housed Taylor's office. And soon trainees were popping in and out with gay abandon. As they practiced with their monitor Envoys, Taylor contacted Saul about how to dove-tail trips to Home with those of the main group that still had to make the trip. And then it was just the waiting and watching for them to return. Some came back with little or no change. Others were more seriously affected. But all returned, safely, and under their own power.

Taylor had all of them meet outside his office building, and he administered the stripes and passports. After congratulating them, he quietly turned and went back into his office. His father followed him, obviously puzzled.

"Wait," Taylor said. And five minutes later there was a knock on his doorway.

"Sir," the woman said. "The others and I would like to know when we are to join the regiment."

"Ah. You want to join up? Oh, good. I'll be right there," Taylor said, and watched her leave. "By leaving them alone and not mentioning joining up, it left them puzzled. As much as you were," he said to his father. "But, it also made them consider it. On their own. Without my prompting. NOW I know they want to join. Not to get the Envoy training, which I guaranteed them was free, but simply because they wanted to join. Clean separation between the two." His father just cuffed him on the shoulder and laughed.

Signing them up was carried out by Sid, aided by the original guards. Because of the complexities of human society, it took the rest of the afternoon. Forms and physicals, room assignments and instructions on uniforms, oaths and other things that humans feel are important. But by dinner time they were all brand new second lieutenants, in uniforms of their own making, complete with the insignia of rank, and with the military course beginning to open up in their minds. Sid's squad, having finished their Envoy training, were elevated to first lieutenants, due to their service time, and made squad leaders, leaving Sid as a Captain in charge of the 'company'.

Thursday morning the troops were rolled out early to begin the long, arduous process of turning civilians into military personnel. They had the knowledge. Now, they needed the physicality. Physical training, marching in formations, learning to work as teams, and learning how to demonstrate respect outside of their Enclave. Also, they had to learn the UN-military skills of blending minds, riding the air, group translations and such. And as they learned, their cadre learned about each of them. Strengths and weaknesses, talents and prior skills. And most important, the ability to lead.

Fran and Mark came out and taught the troops how to repair their own bodies and build muscle for use, not for show, and strengthen their bodies in general. At the same time, they checked to be sure that none of them had anything that would impair their ability to perform their duties. Minor things were corrected, often without the individual realizing it had been done. Allergies were corrected, antibodies to disease were introduced, blood typed and matched to ensure that transfusions could be performed either way, should they be necessary.

The first day is always a shock to a new recruit. But, like countless before them, they weathered it. The group began to understand what was expected of them. Mastering it would take longer. For the next eight weeks, the troops would be on the go for twelve hours a day, six days a week.

The first two weeks were devoted to at least looking military, albeit a military that was a bit . . . strange. They appeared to be foot soldiers, yet their ranks were spread further apart than would normally be true of foot soldiers when they marched. Then they learned to ride horses, and the reason for the expansion of the ranks began to dawn on the troops. And, by the end of the second week they were doing 'morning parade' as mounted troops and with a long staff held vertically in their right hands – the base of the staff in a lance-cup ahead of the stirrup.

Then, Taylor took the horses away, and the troops learned to ride the idea of a horse – a ghost horse – a horse of air. This, of course, resulted in some surprised laughter from the troops, as they managed to learn to fly in formation, only feet off the ground, and in the positional attitude of one riding a horse. Taylor was pushing them, unmercifully, in order to try to be ready for a parade in the city before the Queen. He felt that it would be a good idea to put in an appearance to show that the regiment was progressing. Besides, if he could pull it off, it would be good advertising, and they'd get more recruits.

By the end of week three they had a routine down, and the staffs had been replaced by specially built shields of Taylor's design but actually created by the individual troops. These appeared to be lances, long lances which, in reality, were weightless but appeared to have weight and mass. They also had another characteristic in the hands of these Envoy trained troops.

The Enclave had been open for a week, and business was not booming. Word of mouth brought a few people out, but hadn't spread widely enough to create crowds. Those that did show up found the modest prices and friendliness of the Envoys, coupled with the spirit of an older period of time to be fun and relaxing as well as informative. The Envoys, on the other hand, learned to deal with people's questions and create an act of their own to please and entertain, and inform those that came.

Taylor had gotten permission to have the side road to the school widened into a landscaped boulevard. The center median was wide enough to allow this 'mounted' force to parade down it, and with room to spare – Taylor was looking to the future when there were more troops. A traffic light was set at the intersection of the boulevard and the driveway to

allow the troops access to that median without being interfered with by vehicles, and 'morning parade' would exit the Enclave and ride down the boulevard to the highway and back, by squads in column of twos behind their leaders.

Taylor, of course, led the troops on the 'morning parade', his lance sporting two pennants – the Royal Arms on a white background and the Home logo on a green background. Behind him rode Sid, with the country's flag. Following Sid were the six squads, each with their own leader. It couldn't be helped. The whole idea of so archaic and ridiculous a thing as a modern army armed with lances and mounted on 'ghost horses' caused the troops to grin, and Taylor did nothing to stop the smiles.

Then it was the day, and the troops formed up on the center avenue of the Enclave, and translated directly to their positions for the parade for the Queen. Other units were before and behind them. But the appearance of these green-clad troops mounted on air drew attention immediately. And as they passed between the crowds lining the street and heard the laughter and cheers of the crowd, they grinned even wider. It earned them a nickname in the media – the Jolly Greens.

The Queen's only comment to Taylor's father, standing beside her, was, "I see he learned how to be outrageous from Muriel." It was said with a smile, though, so the Prince didn't feel that he or Taylor were in trouble.

It was later, in the afternoon, when the Queen and Prince discovered that the outrageous hid a serious motive. In a demonstration for the Queen and dignitaries at an arms demonstration area, Taylor rode out, alone, with a somewhat shorter lance, and destroyed three targets, one truck, and 'disabled' a tank with what appeared to be a beam of fire. This while 'riding' at approximately sixty miles an hour. He turned back and 'trotted' to the front of the Queen's stand, and bowed to her from 'horseback'.

"Come here, you young rascal," the Queen said. Taylor complied, and the Queen cuffed him, affectionately, on the side of his head. "You've managed to be as outrageous as Muriel. Is she as serious as you?"

"From what I've seen of the records, more so. However, she has more of a tendency to capture enemies in shields," Taylor said. "I feel that there are times when an actual show of force can be more demoralizing to an enemy than merely capturing them."

"I'm sure you know what comes to mind, now that I've seen you in action, scamp," said the Queen with a grin. '. . . a burning spear and a horse of air . . . .' Really, Taylor. Tom O'Bedlam?"

"Oh, just 'a host of furious fancies'," he replied, with an equal grin, and they both laughed. "Sorry I don't have more troops, yet," he added. "I hope today's trooping the colors will draw some more in. I'd like a company of a hundred by the end of summer. Eventually, I think, maybe a thousand mounted troops, all trained to do what I did, here. But I've got to find a place to put them."

“Leave that to me,” said the Queen. “There are empty military forts that could be made ready for you.”

“If you please, Your Majesty, if we know where to go and are given leave to level buildings and rebuild, I can have Envoys do that in less time than your people could,” Taylor said.

The Queen turned to her son and said, “I see what you mean. MUCH more mature than I expected, and with a vision of what he wants. We'll see, young man,” she said, turning back to Taylor. Get your hundred, and we will definitely see what else we can do.” Taylor bowed, went back to his 'horse' and mounted, bowed again and rode away.

As the Queen watched him go, she said to Taylor's father, 'You know, I think we'll have to knight him for this escapade. He's just outdone everything that I'd hoped for, and he's only just started.”

“I know, Your Majesty. I know. I keep wondering where he was hiding,” his father said.



# Chapter 35

## The Opening of the Enclave

(Friday, two weeks after Taylor's training)

On Friday, two and a half weeks after Taylor was trained, Muriel and Ted were invited to the opening of the new Enclave. This wouldn't be the public Grand Opening – that would come later – but the public could now enter Enclave ahead of that and see what was happening. Muriel and Ted acknowledged the invitation, and brought a squad, each.

The public side of the new Enclave was now completed. Buildings to emulate the town outside the walls were still being constructed, though some were finished and 'occupied' by Envoys ready to show the public what life was like during the middle ages. Costumes had been created, literally, to emulate what that period was like. Tours were set up for the existing 'occupied' structures, as well as up on the wall around Enclave where 'troops' were ready to demonstrate what the crenelations were for, and the accuracy of the antique style weapons. And the Envoys were enjoying the play-acting they were set to do.

Restaurants were set up like taverns and inns, although no alcoholic beverages were served. This was partly because of the expectation of children being in the building, and partly because they hadn't received a license to dispense alcoholic beverages. However, a discussion was going on that grape juice could be substituted for wine, and there were various ways to create beer and ale that had no alcohol, and these were being used in the interim, until the decision as to whether or not to apply for a license to dispense alcohol.

Part of the discussion was that this was Envoy property, therefore not subject to the laws of the rest of the country. It was felt that it would be a bad precedent to apply for a license. Others countered with the fact that they would be serving people who lived in that country and would not understand the Enclave rules. Ted settled that question, finally, by saying that they would NOT apply for a license. Period. The camel's nose would not enter the tent.

That left it up to Taylor and the restaurant managers to hash out whether alcohol would be served, and under what conditions, though Muriel DID add that the Envoys of her Enclave managed to follow the rules of the country, despite not having a license from them. Taylor agreed, that if the managers could figure out a way to serve alcohol without endangering children, then they could do so. But they'd have to prove to him that they had a procedure in place that would work under all conceivable circumstances.

In the shops, both Ted and Muriel were ecstatic. Clothing shops had inexpensive period clothing for men, women, and children. Complete outfits for twenty five dollars, and pieces ranged down from there in proportion. The armorer had full sets of armor for fifty dollars, chain mail shirts for ten dollars and shields for five. Assorted swords and spears ranged from five dollars down to two dollars, and none of them could be made to take an edge being nothing more than a shield shaped and weighted like the original article. Any of

these could be made up on the spot for a customer, and customized for two to five dollars more.

The area used for the various types of smith were combined in one structure, but had separate forges. One end held the tinsmith/copper smith. The other end held the farrier, and Enclave actually had horses that needed shoeing and general hoof care. The middle was the blacksmith, and was the largest area. In many medieval towns the farrier and blacksmith would be the same man. Here, they were separated to allow the farrier to concentrate on the Enclave's horses, while the blacksmith made items that visitors could purchase, such as hooks, hinges, small knives and tools. Though blacksmiths also used to make armor, that was separated out, since real armor would have been too heavy for modern people to wear.

Also normally the tinsmith and copper smith would have been separate and possibly itinerant workers, traveling between villages and towns mending and making dishes, lamps, pots and pans, and such. Again, in the Enclave, they were combined in order to sell their wares to the visitors. The purpose of charging people for souvenirs was simply for them to feel that the products had value, which it did to the individual. The Enclave was an educational experience in the realities of life in the Middle Ages, that could be accented with souvenirs at a very reasonable and inexpensive price. In fact, the prices were in line with those during the Middle Ages. And the Envoys manning the shops and restaurants were very happy to talk about or demonstrate the functions of the peasantry of the time.

On the other side of the street were the cooper, toy shop, and furniture shop. The cooper actually made barrels the way they had been made in the Middle Ages. He also made miniatures that were sold at the toy shop along with the types of toys that children in the Middle Ages might have enjoyed. The furniture shop did the same, making real period pieces, as well as miniatures that could be purchased at the toy store.

A Chandler and general store were next, selling candles, of course, and various travel needs like rope, used saddle bags, tins of biscuits, cheese, needles, thread, and cloth. Following that was a tack shop that sold saddles, bridles, and assorted tack cleaning and horse grooming equipment and supplies. And finally, a chapel where services were actually held on Sunday mornings for those that wanted to attend. It could hold fifty people at a time. The priest, since this replicated the religion of the time and not that current to the country, was actually salaried by the Enclave. He was a young human man, just ordained, who was a history buff and enjoyed talking to people about what the religion was like during the period. And remarkably enough, he was honest about it.

Around the corner were restaurants and taverns. Several had minstrels for entertainment. Across the inside of the front wall of the Enclave were public restrooms, and others were in the restaurants and taverns. And outside, on the edges of the streets were buskers – musicians that set up at various places and trying hard not to compete with each other.

Living quarters for the 'shop owners' were above the shops and restaurants, though these weren't finished as Taylor had no intention of having visitors injured by going up and down narrow stairs. Likewise, the use of candles, lanterns and such were emulated rather

than real. Clever Envoys had figured out how to make shields and power look like flame and provide light without any risk of fire.

Ted was completely enthralled with the public side of the Enclave, and how it had been thought out. And he made a point of telling Taylor that, which made Taylor stand up straighter. Muriel found it interesting, especially as it tallied with the history that the Envoys had loaded her with. But it was merely interesting to her.

The military side of the Enclave was a whole different matter, as were the horses that Taylor used to train the troops in how to ride. The dining hall for the regiment was next to the keep. Three lines of barracks buildings marched toward the front wall and a final barracks building. Each building was broken up into individual rooms with shared bathrooms. Where women were to be housed in the same barracks as men, care was to be taken to have only women on each side of a shared bathroom. Each barracks also included a day room for use when the troops were off duty. The one barracks at the end held the ranking officers and administration offices for the regiment. It was an organization that Muriel could appreciate and applaud.

And then there were the horses. These were heavy horses, descended from those used in combat in medieval times, and noted for their ability to pull heavy loads in modern times. At the present time, Enclave only had twenty of them, housed in a special stable behind the Enclave, outside the walls. Large, gentle horses that were easy to learn to ride, but difficult to sit due to their size, they gave the regiment their characteristic 'seat' during parade and during combat maneuvers. And Muriel thought that they were possibly the most beautiful creatures on earth.

The houses outside of the Enclave walls were both those of the merchant class and of the peasantry. These gave visitors a better idea of how things were laid out and what life was like outside the shop or farm. Here, visitors could see what the upstairs, if there was one, was like as long as they were willing to be translated up and down by Envoys. Children particularly enjoyed the experience, and Muriel expected that at least some of them would be seeking Envoy training when they were old enough to take it. Parents weren't necessarily as quick to take the Envoys up on their offer, though many did at the insistence of their children.

Taylor's Enclave, of necessity, couldn't hold as many visitors as Muriel's could. For one thing, half the area was given over to the regiment. But the biggest reason was that the thematic side of it was kept small on purpose, to be a more intimate experience for the visitors. Muriel wondered how he'd manage larger crowds after the official opening, as the crowd that was here already nearly maxed out the suggested occupancy for the loose tours of the grounds. But Taylor had already considered that. The fliers and advertisements for Enclave suggested that tickets and reservations be purchased in advance to ensure that they would be able to enter.

Guests were another matter. However, Taylor expected that the number of them would be lower than in Muriel's Enclave, and was accounted for in the actual maximum number of people that would be allowed in at a time. He also added that at least one Envoy and two members of the Regiment had taken Mark's medical course and were licensed by Home to

take care of accidents and illnesses. Guests and trainees, of course, were accorded the same privileges that were offered in Muriel's Enclave. The same held true for any human employees.

"Where do you go from here?" Muriel asked Taylor.

"I don't know," Taylor replied. "I want to let it run for a while, and see where the problems are. Organization, size, additions or deletions, things like that. I've got the room. This property is much larger than the school or this Enclave make it look. And the Envoys tell me that whole sections can be moved and juggled around fairly easily. So, I can expand on three sides if I need to, depending on what's needed."

"Well, you might want to have more space for guests and visitors to stay," Ted said. "Just a suggestion to think about, not something I'm saying you should do. And, on another note, have you considered putting out a catalog of products to sell worldwide?"

"I thought about it, and talked to some of the Envoys," Taylor said. "It's a good idea in some ways, but impractical in others. We can't very well ship a suit of armor to someone if we don't know his or her size, or fitting requirements, for example. Basically, some stuff is custom made to the person, and made out of shields like clothing is. Also, there's the export problem to think about."

"I'd think the Queen would be willing to change the Treaty, if she could be shown that it benefited both the Enclave and the country. Or do you mean export to other countries?" asked Muriel.

"Export to other countries," Taylor replied.

"Wait a minute!" Ted said. "You're intending to set up a holding company. So just set up a company outside of Enclave to make the items, controlled by the holding company but answerable to the laws of this country. Then you only have one set of export problems to manage, and that's fairly straight forward."

"O-K! That sounds like a possibility. Certainly something I can think about. I'll check again and see if there is anything that we CAN sell without a fitting. Or if there's a way to do fittings, too," Taylor said. "Let me work on that."

"Taylor," Muriel said, puzzled, "What's going on at the entrance to the parking lot? There seems to be some sort of bottleneck."

"I don't know," he replied. "There shouldn't be any problems there, but you're right. There's a long line of people who want to leave, but it's not moving." He translated down to the exit from the lot. In a couple of seconds his troops appeared gathered around that point, and an argument seemed to be going on.

"Let's get down there," Ted said to Muriel. "I have a hunch what's happening, and Taylor may need some backup." They located a space and translated into it.

"Look, sonny," one man in some sort of uniform was saying, "we have a job to do, here. So just push off."

"What you call your job is a violation of the treaty between the nation known as Home and this country, as you would know if you'd read the treaty," Taylor shouted.

"We're doing our duty. These people don't have passports to enter this country, and are trying to leave your place, here, with things they haven't paid duty on," the man said.

"Taylor," Muriel said, "Don't bother arguing with him. Just arrest this bunch and hold them for the Queen's pleasure. It's a clear treaty violation. You don't need to explain it to him. You have the authority to take him into custody."

"Stay out of this, little girl . . . ." the man began, pulling out a gun.

"What IS it with people calling me 'little girl' then trying to shoot me," Muriel said, as she disarmed the man and hung him in the air ten feet off the ground. "Now then, you people. You've decided to set up shop on Enclave property. Which means that you are trying to enforce laws that do not apply while trespassing. So, first, you are in violation of the treaty between this country and Home. Second, you are trespassing. Third, you've just been witnessed to have assaulted the Leader of Home with deadly force. As you are all co-conspirators in this fiasco, you will all be charged with attempted assassination. Taylor, would you please tell your father that we have these 'persons of interest' in custody and that if the Queen doesn't have responsible people here take them I'll dispose of them, myself."

"Um, Muriel? What do you mean by 'dispose of'," Taylor asked.

"I'll return their remains to their next of kin," Muriel said. "I am thoroughly tired of people trying to shoot me. This happened on property owned by Home, and therefore technically is within our jurisdiction. We offer the Queen, your grandmother, the opportunity to find a means of instructing these people and the organization they belong to in the finer arts of international law and cooperation with foreign governments."

"Ouch," Ted said quietly.

"I have no problem with making an example of bullies trying to exceed their authority and carve out an empire of their own," Muriel said. "Especially when such bullies use armed aggression as a means to do it."

In moments, the Queen arrived, translated in by Taylor's father. "What's going on here," she said.

"Your Majesty, these people are in violation of the laws of the land, and are attempting to interfere with the proper enforcement of the customs and inspection rules and regulations," the man ten feet above them said.

"Your Majesty," Taylor said, "these people set up a customs inspection station on property owned by Home, in violation of the treaty between this country and Home, and in violation of the laws concerning trespass. When Muriel pointed out that he was on Enclave property, that man called Muriel 'little girl' and drew a gun on her. She disarmed him and 'elevated his status', so to speak. I've taken the liberty of having the local constables contacted, they should be here, soon."

"Very good," the Queen replied. "Now, would you happen to know the head of Customs and Immigration?"

"I know who he is, of course, but I've never formally met him," Taylor replied. "I know of his second, too."

"Very good," the Queen said. "Would you be so kind as to see that they arrive safely?"

"My pleasure, Your Majesty," Taylor said with a grin. "Sid," he added, sending the image of the two men, "bring them."

"Sir!" Sid replied, saluting, and translated out. Seconds later he reappeared with the two men.

"Ah! There you are," the Queen said to one of them. "Are you aware of your people coming out here and setting up a customs inspection stop?"

"Why, of course. These people are attempting to bring goods into the country without duty being paid on them, and may, in fact, be entering the country illegally," he said.

"He broke my knight!" a young boy shouted. Muriel went over to the car and looked in.

"Was it a knight that you got here?" she asked.

"Yea. I bought it with my own money. And he broke it!"

An Envoy appeared by Muriel, and said, "Here you are, sir. And this one won't break. And because the first one broke, here's your money back." The boy took the knight, and the money, and looked at them.

"But . . . HE should have to pay for it. Not you! It's not your fault that it broke," the boy said.

"True. But I'm here, and I can do it because I want you to be happy. And he will pay for it, one way or another, sir," the Envoy said. "Believe me, people who bully young people DO end up paying for it."

"Thank you," the boy said, and his father beamed.

"Your son is a very good boy," Muriel said to the father. "He's polite, and he's honest."

You should be proud of him.”

The father beamed even more, and said, “I am, miss. And thank you. But, who are you?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. My name is Muriel. I’m the Leader of Home and Ambassador to earth. And I’m just a human girl,” she said, and walked away. Rejoining the others, she found that the head of the customs detail had been put back on the ground, and he and all the members of the detail had had their badges and identification removed and were in custody of the local police. The head of the customs department was likewise under arrest, and they were being placed in cars to take them to jail.

As the cars began to move and the boy called out ‘thank you’ and waved at Muriel, she turned to Taylor and said, “He’ll be back, someday when he’s grown up some. He’ll be back to take the Envoy training.”

“You know?” Taylor asked.

“Yea, we made an impression, and he’s beginning to show signs of being able to make a mental link. Oh, not now. But he will,” Muriel said.

“Well,” said Her Majesty, “I believe we’re done here, though I would like to see this Enclave.”

“By all means, Your Majesty,” Taylor said. “I’d be happy to show you around.”

Ted and Muriel took their leave at that point and headed back to their own Enclave. Ted had fought actions by Customs and Immigration in America from behind the scenes. Here, it had played out in action. In both cases, though, precedent had been set. Enclave was inviolate and not subject to customs duties or immigration laws in two countries, now. He felt that he could build on that with other countries.

Muriel was just happy that Taylor had shown that he could act decisively in a crunch. His calling in his father to bring the Queen had turned the tide, nicely, and saved Muriel from having to act in a unilateral fashion. Both the Queen’s actions and Muriel’s threat would ripple through the country’s political structure, and suggest to other would-be empire builders that maybe picking on the Enclaves wasn’t so good an idea.

# Chapter 36

## Threats and Promises

### (Saturday morning)

Saturday morning brought a request from Melanie for assistance. Electronic traffic, phone, email and various social networks, showed a marked increase in certain areas of the country as well as outside the country. Three areas in particular stood out, and it didn't make any sense. The one inside the country was in a state noted for its conservative values and 'no negotiation' attitude toward immigration. Outside the country, the one in the South American nation seemed totally harmless, but the information in the traffic didn't seem to pertain to anything in other electronic traffic. And one from one European nation appeared to be travel arrangements for sometime in the past, and were directed to people other than the ones to which the traffic was sent.

Fred perked up at the news, and was fairly vibrating with eagerness to be at it. Muriel just smiled as she handed the information to him and turned him loose. In minutes not only his squad but the on-duty squad were plowing through massive amounts of information and finding correlations.

"What just happened," Bart said, translating into her office. "Suddenly my on-duty squad was scrambling to put information into their computers or get information from yours, and even my off-duty squads have shown an interest. Muriel looked to the break room area of her office.

"Hmm. Even mine are showing more activity than I've normally seen," she said. "Melanie said that there was unusual traffic in several spots, including three that stood out. It must be that Fred found some link and has 'called in the reserves'," she said.

"Terrorists," Mata said. "Well?" she added, when they looked at her, "what else would you expect when Melanie hollers for help? The increase in electronic traffic suggests that orders – or at least directions – are being sent to move some group. Where and for what purpose she doesn't know. Fred saw the start of a connection right away, and hauled in our on-duty squad, to assist his squad. And then it snowballed. At the rate they're all going they should be done soon."

And they were. Suddenly, the flurry stopped. Altogether it had only take about a half hour. But the results were something else, again.

"Washington. Again," said Fred. "We're still trying to find out when and exactly where. But we know how. There is a group, downstate, that calls themselves a border guard, but are actually just bigoted red-necks that are upset with the Federal government. They'd made a name for themselves by stopping a number of illegal immigrants that were coming into the country. Apparently, it was a cover. They were throw aways that the cartels were sending through. Those cartels, two of them, were in contact with a group in France that made travel



arrangements for terrorists.”

“So,” he added, “We know where one group is coming in from, but not when. Yet. There's another group, too, coming in through Canada. They're coming in openly, by plane, but not under their own names. But we know the airline they're using, and the approximate destination of the plane. And with that, we're up to date with the information we have.”

“Oh, the social networking traffic? That was flags for various web sites, where posts were set up. Key words in those posts gave instructions for preparing for the groups. Emails used the same key word process, for signals that would be sent to others. So,” he concluded, “we're looking for when the groups come in, and where they will be hitting in Washington. Melanie has what we have, now, so I imagine that things will settle down.”

“But . . . how did you break it so fast?” asked Muriel.

“Oh, that was simple. If the key isn't in the message, it has to be somewhere. And with the volume of traffic, it was doubtful that it was a prearranged code. So, we brute forced it. Sorry about grabbing your squads like that, Bart. It got out of hand for a bit, and they just dived in. What we had to do was figure out what social network posts were aimed at what websites, and what particular posts on those websites. That's where the brute force came in. There were ten websites that they used, and the keywords in the social networking sites were stacked in such a way that one word only referred to one area of a post, then on to the next word. We have the key, now, so future posts on websites and social networking can be decoded quickly.”

“That sounds complicated,” Muriel said.

“Not really. Anything that a person needs to be able to figure out 'on the fly' needs to be something that he can understand. Computer encryption has the ability to be much better, but is too complicated for a person to understand in the field without another, equal, computer. So that left us with only human capabilities. This was complicated from the outside, but not once the basic rules were figured out. And that, as much as the information contained, was what I was looking for. It's the type of pattern matching that a computer can't do, because it can't – if you'll forgive the term – think outside the box.” Ted quietly groaned.

“So,” Muriel said, “now that you've got the pattern you can . . . .”

“Reading them is a trivial exercise, once you have the pattern, yes,” Fred said. “Oh, maybe not easy for someone that isn't used to it, but still quite within the reach of most professionals in the field. Melanie's got good people. But it would still be faster for her to send the information to us and let us decrypt it for her. Besides, we might come up with some other information from it – make new connections. Maybe even figure out who the people are.”

“Fred,” Muriel said, “we are SO fortunate to have you on our side. Thank you for joining up.”

"Oh . . . well," Fred blushed, "thank you for having me." He wandered back to his area in a proud haze, a wide grin on his face. Carl had to gently urge him over to his seat.

"It never ceases to amaze me," Ted said, walking into her office. "You did the same with that boy, yesterday. You did it with Taylor, when you realized that he was picking up everyone around him. It can be summed up as 'you cared for him and about him'. And that's what makes you the Leader of Home that you are."

"I wish you wouldn't go on like that," Muriel said. "I'm not something on a pedestal. I'm human. I make mistakes. I can even kill. I can even kill in anger, which is worse. Yea, I care about people. So? Lots of people do."

"Change of subject," Muriel said, looking uncomfortable. "The things we do with computers. You know they aren't strictly legal by American standards."

"True. But we aren't in America. We're in Enclave, and make our own rules. And the Government contracts with us to do exactly what we're doing and have the capability of doing. You might call it the ultimate wire-tap," Ted said.

"You might. But I've talked with Jeff. Most of what we do the NSA can do. We just do it faster," Muriel said.

"And better," Ted replied. "And better. Don't forget that. We make connections that they aren't capable of seeing."

"Actually, they are. When they're taught how to. And we've been doing that, too. When we send the reports back we include how we came to our conclusions as well as the conclusions, themselves," Muriel said. "They've been trying to figure out a way to program that into their computers, but aren't having much luck. It seems like there are too many variables – like the computer gets lost in them and can't resolve the situation."

"You've got a company that makes software. Have you asked them about it?" asked Ted.

"Actually, yes. And they offered the NSA some algorithms," Muriel said. "NSA wouldn't even look at them because of the license on them. So, now they're working on how to create a whole program that would do what our Envoys manage to do. And humans do, but slower. By the way, they're working on this on their own time, not on company time. When I found out, though, I offered them equipment to use. Some of the equipment the programmers had at home was almost archaic. No strings attached. Literally. Equipment, operating system of their choice, if it took commercial software we'd buy it for them."

"And?" Ted asked.

"Oh, they took the equipment. A couple of them are building a game with it, which is fine, since they offered to give the company first dibs on it, if they can get it to work. Some of the others are working on the decryption problem from various angles. And a couple are

working on their doctorates.”

“So, why are you doing all this for them?” he asked.

“Would you believe? They do programming for relaxation. Sure, they do it all day long, and you'd think they'd be tired of it. But no. The change in what they're working on is what's relaxing,” Muriel said. “There's even been a couple of times when someone has come in with a breakthrough for the company programs that was born out of an idea they had for one of the things they work on at home.”

“Have you offered any of them your college courses?”

“Yep. Turned down flat, right now. Oh, they appreciated the thought. But some just don't want a doctorate, and the two that do want to fight it out with their advisers. Apparently, their advisers are old school, and won't accept some of the more recent methods. So, it's become a game to the people to see if they can slip something by them. People sure have strange ideas of fun,” Muriel said.

“OK, then, what about Jeff?”

“Oh, he's off in la-la land, somewhere with an idea for a new computer. He says that ours are too slow for what we're trying to do, and he has an idea for how to speed them up. Right now, he's having a problem finding a manufacturer that will build to his design. Either they say it can't be done, or they want to own the patents and think they can take advantage of a 'kid'.”

“Have him send the specs off to Home. No, on second thought, I know the ones to send them to, I'll talk to Jeff. If he's got the specs for the whole computer, he'd probably have the prototype back in a day,” Ted said. “I'll talk to him right now. Besides, I'd like to know how he's doing on that car he designed.” Ted translated directly to the door to Jeff's office.

“Jeff, Muriel tells me that you're having problems getting a new design for a computer built.”

“Hmm? Oh, hi, Ted.”

“I'm interrupting something,” Ted said as a statement.

“Oh, no problem. I can go back to that anytime. Yea, none of the manufacturers will touch it unless I give them the patents.”

“OK, I've got the contacts of a group in Home that could turn out a new computer in a day, if your designs are that far along. I'd be happy to introduce you to them. And, if this is a breakthrough you probably ought to send the specs over to Enclave's patent attorney, too. That would lock it up so that others couldn't just steal the ideas.”

“Oh, he already has them. Nice guy. Doesn't pretend that he understands things. And

believes in plain language patent applications. OK, I'll get the specs for you."

"By the way," Ted added, "how are things working out with the car manufacturer?"

"Oh, great. They're doing a mix of my ideas and the way things have been done before. They just don't have enough workers with the training to do a complete car my way, yet. They should have the first one done next week. We'll see how that goes. Oh, and before you ask, Muriel took me over and introduced me to the plant manager as Ambassador Jeff. He took me down to the design section and told them that I was in charge of design, now. Not the management and supervisory side, but of the actual designs. They looked skeptical until I unrolled the plans," he chuckled. "I had to call in my Envoys and Don and his Envoys, and pushed them all through before noon. They're all trained, now, and having a party going over my designs and making suggestions. No more skepticism."

Ted laughed. "Looks like you're in good with them, then."

"Oh, yea. We've been bouncing ideas back and forth and making changes and stuff. Mostly to get Envoy style building to mate up with normal earth style building," Jeff said. "We're trying to get an assembly line crew trained so we can do the whole car. Oh, here. Here's the plans and specs on the computer. It takes a special monitor, too, and the plans for that are in there."

"OK," Ted said. "I'll send them right off and ask them how long. If you see a strange Envoy down here, it's probably from that team wanting to get further information from you."

"No problem. Envoys are Envoys. And he won't be strange for long if he's going to talk to me," Jeff said. Ted translated out with the plans and specs. Five minutes later he translated back in, with company.

"Just how big are these chips?" the Envoy said. "Oh, sorry, I'm Alex, and I head up the Design section in Home.

"Small. Measured in millimeters. I thought I had the dimensions on it."

"You do. I just couldn't believe it. You can't use electricity for it," Alex said.

"Page ten. Power tap and feed. Electricity is too crude to run it."

From there, the discussion got so esoteric that Ted couldn't begin to understand what they were talking about. The most he could understand is that for an earthly manufacturer to do the design, it would have to be ten times larger and run on electricity. He decided that the best thing was to just let them alone, so he went back to Muriel's office.

"How'd it work out?" Muriel asked.

"I think I created a monster," Ted said.

“Naw, he was that way before,” Muriel said.

“No, not Jeff. Alex. The head of the design team in Home. He's down here talking with Jeff, and I have absolutely NO idea what they're talking about. But I take it that it's a major breakthrough in computer engineering, or something.”

“Ah, yes. That would be Jeff, all right,” Muriel said. “Funny thing is, no matter how complex he makes things, they always work. He might improve on them later but they always work the first time out. So, since everyone except you and I are tied up for a while, why don't we go get something to eat. I've been interested in that small shop over on the other side of Enclave.”

# Chapter 37

## A Change of Plans

(Saturday afternoon)

“Ted! Change of plans. Ask them to make it up to go. I just got an update from Mata. It's not Washington, DC. It's the State of Washington. A reference that Fred didn't understand turned out to be a Medieval village. They're planning to hit it tomorrow.”

“Ouch! OK, go. I'll collect things and bring them to your office. Try to see who we can get in there.”

“Mata,” Muriel said as she translated in, “we need to find out how we can get people in there. Especially at the entrance.”

“Already been on the phone to them. After I explained who I was, they were very happy to have our help. I can get fifty Envoys in, in appropriate costumes, this afternoon. I'm checking with the FBI to see if we can get authority to arrest and hold until police can take them in. Home is sending in five Envoys that have experience with explosives to do stealth aerial searches, and they're starting now, on the possibility that they're already set, or at least some of them are. And Melanie is frantic.”

“Of course she is. How did Fred miss it?” asked Muriel.

“All of the references simply said Washington. It wasn't until he correlated where people were going that he realized it was the State, instead. Then the reference that he didn't understand made sense. It's in retaliation for America helping build that Enclave in Europe. I know, it wasn't America that did it. But they think it was,” Mata replied. “They consider it an abomination. Hold on . . . .”

Ted arrived, and Chuck immediately had trays set up on a chair and desk, and was parceling out food. Muriel relayed what she had learned and how it happened. The food was as good as Muriel had heard, but neither one of them had much time to enjoy it.

“OK,” Mata said, “I've got an update from Henry. His FBI squad will be there in what he calls 'scruffies'. In other words, they won't be in suits. He's already contacted the village to let them know that his people WILL NOT be armed. After all, that squad doesn't need to be, and they know it. . . . OK, now a report from the stealth squad. They've found five devices already and translated them out. But they don't know what to do with them.”

“Hold on, Mata,” Ted sent. A minute later he said, “Mata, have them translate them to this location. Maintenance is waiting for them and will disarm them or blow them up safely if they can't be disarmed. Muriel,” he added, “I want the people behind this. We're going to roll this group up, and all their contacts and leaders.”

"I agree," she said. "If we can get them away from the FBI long enough to get the information."

"I'll talk to Henry about it. This isn't a time to play by the rules. This is a time to just take them out. Period," Ted said with some vehemence. "By their even calling a replica Medieval village an abomination I have a fair idea who it is. Or at least the type of people it is. They're trying to hide behind their religion, but there isn't a single religion that condones killing unarmed civilians, or women and children. I won't kill them. I'll just pull a Muriel – dump them on judgment square then bring them back and let them blubber all over the FBI."

"Then make sure that you get an update from Caleb, and LISTEN to Sergeant Carter," Muriel said, quietly. "You don't need to go through what I did." Ted turned and looked at her in shock. "I know what you're intending, Ted. And I'd be the last person to try to stop you. But if you assemble that mass of people – 'martyrs' if you will – you'll go through the same thing I did with those religious nuts. And it just isn't worth going through the aftermath of such a mass of hurting souls for such scum. Go see Caleb first, so you can handle it. And contact Sergeant Carter and let him set it up properly."

"And what would you do then?" Ted asked.

"If it were me? After giving them such a shock? I'd dump them back into their society, and let them tell the rest just how wrong they are. Except that they'd never be believed. So, just give them to the FBI and let THEM handle it," Muriel said. "There's just no fixing stupid. And before you ask, after that mess with Fran, I asked Betty for information on the various religions. What I found out was that every one of the religious books is some combination of history, lies, and fantasy. None of it is even internally coherent. Most of it is biased against women. All of it is meant to keep people down – keep them in their place – which is to say keep them giving money to the priests or leaders. It's all a scam of the worst type. Worse than most lotteries."

"Ouch! That's a bit strong, isn't it?"

"Go ask Betty for the information. Then you tell me," Muriel replied. "If you can show me that I'm wrong, then I'll accept it."

"What about the good that religion does?"

"Ted, what religion does for most people is provide them with like-minded people to act as a support group, and candy-coat life for those that can't take it straight. And yes, there are people that need that. But, when I see the harm that religions do, I have to wonder if it's worth keeping them around for the little good that they do. The jury's still out on that one. Maybe, in a few years, I'll have a better idea. But not right now."

"You know they'll just call you an atheist, don't you?"

"They can call me the King of Spain for all I care. Better still is that they not call me at all. There's really nothing that they have to say that I want to hear," Muriel replied with finality.

“Muriel, the stealth squad has already translated five improvised explosive devices out of the village, and has noted a number of suspicious persons in the area.”

“Got it. Thanks, Mata. Ted, you're about to become a teacher with a bunch of kids on a field trip. Bring money. KIDS!,” she said and sent. “Field trip. Civvies. Bring your Envoys in civvies, too. We're going to learn about Medieval life and remove a bunch of terrorists.” The mental cheer was heart-warming. “Mata, I want all four squads in civvies. We leave in five minutes. Oh, and alert the village that we're coming in.”

Ten minutes later, they were walking through the gates of the village. ::I want a mesh mind from everyone, then scatter in groups,:: Muriel sent. ::One 'adult' for each group. Ted, I'm sticking with you. With that many minds I may need to have somebody keep me from walking into things::

The groups split up, and spread out among the buildings. The 'children' kept up a running banter, taking turns between talking and looking for explosives and suspicious characters. The blacksmith's shop and the inn were the two most likely places for such devices, but the stealth squad had been all over them, but they didn't leave any area unsearched. Then one of the 'kids' noted that there were quite a few men with backpacks on.

“That isn't right,” Muriel muttered. “Why would men have backpacks on? Kids I can understand. But men?”

“And why not women?” asked Ted in a low voice. “Have the squads send the information and location to the stealth squad.”

Muriel did, and in seconds the men started disappearing from the crowd. Mata sent to Muriel that there were two or three men that showed signs of nervousness, but didn't have backpacks. Muriel suggested they might be handlers and witnesses, or have already dumped their backpacks, and squads immediately homed in on trash receptacles. Two more devices were found and translated out, as were the overly nervous men.

From her over-all view of the village, from the eyes of the squads, Muriel noted a number of men making for the exit, and alerted the squads. Some of the men turned out to be FBI officers in civilian clothes that were following others that were suspicious, and Muriel discovered that there were special agents in the parking lot ready to pick up those designated. Muriel also found that the special agents were those trained by Henry, so she contacted them and identified herself, then told them about the others that the agents inside the village hadn't seen.

Muriel was just finishing coordinating the pickups when she collapsed. Fran immediately appeared by her side and, at Ted's suggestion, switched to her white Class 'A' uniform. Mata finished the coordination and sent to the squads to make a final sweep in uniforms, then translate in to her location.

One of the employees of the village immediately rushed over and said, “I'll get



administration to call for an ambulance.”

“Don't,” Ted said. “She'll be all right. Her doctor's with her.”

“Where? All I see is a little girl in a white uniform! Where did she come from?” asked the woman.

Ted presented his Home passport, then located Muriel's passports and presented them to the woman and explained why they were there. He also explained that Fran was a fully qualified doctor, despite looking like a young girl, and that Muriel was already responding. As he explained, squads started filling up the square around them, and none of them seemed concerned.

Mark also showed up. “Hmm, this time she did it to herself,” he quipped, but didn't even bother to talk to Fran. Just stood there and smiled.

“Quit gloating, Mark,” Muriel muttered. “Or I'll give you my headache. Ouch! That's the last time I try to take on so many minds at once.” She took a few deep breaths, then sat up. “Well?”

“We got them all,” Mata said. “Devices are disarmed and being sent, fingerprints and all, to the FBI, now. And the FBI is scanning the parking lot for other individuals to add to the collection. They should be able to roll up any outliers from the collection they got here.”

“Is it still on for tomorrow?” Muriel asked, slowly getting to her feet. “I'd hate to think that we missed any of them.”

“Don't worry about it,” Ted said. “I'll handle it with my squad and the FBI. Did anybody happen to alert Taylor? It's possible that they meant to hit both villages at once.”

“I did,” Mata said. “and they tried. They made the mistake of trying to get into the military compound. He rolled them up nicely, and they are now awaiting the Queen's pleasure. He was grinning when he told me.”

While Mata was saying this, someone else bustled up with an officious look. “What's going on here? Who are these people?” she said.

Muriel changed into her Class 'A' uniform, and pulled out her passports. “My name is Muriel, and I'm the Leader of the People of Home. We were contacted by the government to investigate a possible incident. By the time we got through going through emails and various websites, we didn't have time to alert you. So, we brought in my squads and my friends and their squads to blanket the area and search for devices and individuals. The FBI assisted our work by being both inside and outside the village. You can check with them for confirmation.”

The woman looked at the passports, then looked at Muriel, and said, “But you're just a kid!”

"Yep. We pulled it off by looking like we were a field trip of students and teachers. The teachers were all the adult looking members of my squads. The students were the ones that looked like kids and were either from my friend's squads or mine. You can tell which ones are human by the fancier uniforms and the stripes on the epaulettes."

"And the ones in white?"

"My friend the doctor, and her squad," Muriel said. "And yes, she's fully certified as a doctor."

"Well, we can't have these sorts of goings on, here. You'll all have to leave," the woman said.

"Gladly. But, I think you should know, we weren't the ones that brought this here. We're simply the ones that stopped it from happening," Muriel said.

"Bathroom!" Don shouted, and translated out. A second later there was the muffled 'crump' of an explosion.

"That does it!" the woman exclaimed. "Now you're setting off bombs in the bathroom to try to convince me of how good you are. Out!"

"Just a moment," Henry said, coming up to the group. He showed his identification, then said, "I think you should wait until we find out what happened. Fran hasn't left, nor has Mark. So obviously nobody got hurt. Let's see what Don has to say."

Don translated back with an in-wall mounted trash receptacle propelled in front of him in a shield. "It's hot, but contained," he said. "Oh, not radiation. But it would have done significant damage to the structure if I hadn't located it, and could have killed a number of people in there. I ran a scan on the women's room. It's clear. We should have thought of those when we were checking the trash bins around the village."

"My fault," Mata said. "Muriel collapsed from the strain, and I didn't think to suggest them."

"Well, we'll get it back to the lab and find out what we can. If we're lucky, we'll be able to trace it to who ever made it or planted it," Henry said. "How'd you keep it from doing damage?" he asked, looking at the container.

"Oh, I slid a shield inside it, and then tried to find the triggering mechanism to stop it." Don said.

"Just as I thought," the woman from administration said. "He probably set it off, himself."

"Ma'am," Henry said, "I think you should be very careful of making accusations at this point. These people have gone out of their way to try to contain a bad situation. That the only

damage was to a trash receptacle is commendable. Had they not been here you could have had casualties all over the place. Instead, you've had a minor incident that is easily taken care of, and a lot of people going to jail for a terrorist attack on civilians. You should be thanking them."

"Oh, leave it, Henry," Muriel said. "We'll just leave, and let the place blow up, tomorrow."

"What? NO! You can't do that! You have to protect us!" the woman exclaimed.

"You can't have it both ways," Muriel said. "Either we're here to protect you, or you can go to hell," she said in disgust. Suddenly, a bar of soap appeared in front of Muriel's face. "Oh, not now, mother. This is NOT the time," Muriel said, and sent it back.

"What ARE you people?" the woman asked.

"Human, in my case," Muriel said. "I even have a mother with very long ears. The people with the stripes are all human. The rest are Envoys from Home. Messengers, if you will. In their case, they are the messenger and the message. The humans with stripes have all had training in the Envoy techniques. And, we're all protectors. Don't? Did you replace the trash receptacle?"

"Yep. Oh, it's shields, but it looks the same and acts the same. It can even be opened with the janitor's key," he said. "Of course, it's a lot more indestructible than the original, but they can have that back when the FBI gets done with it."

"OK, good. Then I think we're done here. Besides, I'm tired of being told I'm the bad guy, then having someone demand that I stay and protect her," Muriel said. "Good afternoon," she added, and translated out. With her went her squads and her friends and their squads. That just left Ted and Henry.

"Ma'am, I think you made a serious mistake. Muriel takes her job very seriously. If she says there wasn't time to warn you, then there wasn't time. And bringing all these people to help find the explosives and the people that set them was over and above what the government asked of her," Henry said. "She'd be within her rights to just let you people be, now. And if you had another incident, then you'd probably be closed down as unsafe. Oh, the government wouldn't do it, but would you want to take your family someplace that was the known target of a terrorist attack?"

"Mister? Where'd the lady go?" a young girl said to Ted.

"What lady?" Ted asked, gently.

"The one that glowed. I want to be like her when I grow up."

"Oh, now, I think she'd like hearing that. She went back to her home." Ted looked up at the little girl's parents, smiled, and said, "Would you like your daughter to meet her? Her

name is Muriel, and she really is an important person. But she's also a person who likes people, and right now I think she'd like nothing more than to hear that a younger girl wants to be like her."

"We'd love to, but it would be too far to go. You're talking about Enclave, aren't you?" the father said.

"Yep. Oh, we could get you there and back with no trouble. There isn't any place you need to be, tomorrow, is there?" asked Ted.

"Well, no."

"Oh, please, daddy?" the girl begged. "Can we?"

"But, honey, it's a long way away. I don't see how we could."

"We'd take you, of course. And, because it's late afternoon, we'll put you up at our Guest House, and make sure you have dinner. Then take you straight home, tomorrow," Ted said. "I'm being selfish," he added. "Muriel was upset by the attitude of that woman. I'd like her to see that there are people that think she's worth being like."

"Well . . .," and he looked at his daughter.

"Oh, goodie! We're going!" she cried, jumping up and down.

::Bart, I need someone to translate their car to their house.::

::I heard. I'm here,:: Bart said.

"Let's go out to the parking lot, to your car. You can give my Security Chief your address, and he can put it in the driveway for you," Ted said.

"You can do that?" asked the father.

"Of course. We do that sort of thing all the time for guests. Now, don't worry about paying for anything. You're guests of Enclave. So, we cover the charges. And no, it's no problem for us."

The girl's father gave Bart the address, and Bart checked to be sure that he had the right place, asking about house color, and other landmarks. Then the car disappeared.

"Well, if you're ready to go," Ted said.

"YES!" the girl shouted.

"You're sure. I wouldn't want to do anything you didn't want to do," he teased.

“You're just like my daddy. I want to go,” she said, taking her father's hand.

“OK, then, hang on tight to your mother and father. We wouldn't want them to get lost,” Ted said, and the girl grabbed her mother's hand, too. And Ted translated them to the street in front of Muriel's office.

# Chapter 38

## A Strange Reunion

(Saturday late afternoon)

"And we're here," Ted said.

"Wow!" the father said. The girl's mother just looked nervous. But the little girl showed no fear. Just looked all around with huge eyes.

"Hi, Dave," Jeff said, as he walked by, coming out of Muriel's office.

"Jeff? You're here?" Dave said.

"Oh, sure. Muriel's the reason why. She and I have been friends for a long time, and when she came out here she invited her friends."

"But . . . I thought you were human!" Dave said.

Jeff grinned. "I didn't want to spook people, so I wore civilian clothes. This is what I usually wear," he said. "Well, this or a couple of other uniforms. But I'm human, all right. Was there something you wanted to see me for?"

"No, this man said that Muriel would like to meet my daughter, Hanna. And I KNOW that Hanna wants to meet her," Dave said.

"Are you like the glowing lady?" Hanna asked?

"Glowing lady . . . ? Oh, I get it. When Muriel was upset with that woman's attitude, she got a bit excited and started glowing. It's usually a first indication that she's angry," Jeff said. "Yea, I'm like her. I'm human, but I've had some special training. And I don't glow. Or not that I know of. By the way, Dave, that man is Ted. He's the other chief Ambassador from Home and leader of Home."

"Oh, my gosh. Oh, dear. I think I really put my foot in it," Dave said.

"Not at all, Dave. You had no reason to know. Nobody told you," Ted said. "So, how do you know Jeff?"

"I'm a test driver, and I was in the design office when he was introduced as some whiz-kid designer and engineer. I didn't believe it until I saw his plans. I've GOT to see that car when it's built."

"It's built. It's in the Maintenance section. We're just waiting for the patents to clear before we show the world," Jeff said. "But I can show it to you tomorrow, if you like."

"I like! I like!" Dave said.

"Can we go see the glowing lady, now?" Hanna asked.

"Sure," Ted said. "Right through that door." And Hanna headed for it at a run. And the door did what it was supposed to. It whooshed and claimed another victim. Hanna stopped dead, and Ted laughed. "Now back up a little." Hanna did, and the door slowly closed. She looked at it funny for a second, then stepped forward, and it whooshed out of the way again.

"COOL! How'd it do that?" she asked.

"You see up over the door? That's a special sensor. And there's one on the other side of the door, too. As long as someone's in range of the sensors, the door will stay open," Ted said.

"Yea. But it moves faster than the one at the super market," she said. But she didn't spend time wondering about that. She just went in. Mata pointed to Muriel's office, and Hanna went that way.

"Ooo! You're still glowing," she said.

"Glowing?" Muriel asked, and looked down. "Oh. Oh, my. Yes, I guess I am glowing."

"Hi, I'm Hanna. I want to be like you when I grow up. I tried to do it, but I can't push it out."

"Hi, I'm Muriel. And I only glow like that when I'm really angry at someone. Oh, no! Not you. That woman at the village."

"I know. I felt it. But I can't get that angry. Why can't I?" asked Hanna.

"I don't know. Maybe you're just a person that doesn't get angry. But how did you feel it?"

"I felt it in my head. I felt like a pressure, then you glowed. And I knew you were angry because I could hear you thinking."

Muriel looked at Ted, and he just nodded. "Oh, dear. No wonder you brought her, Ted. Oh, dear. How are we going to help someone so young?"

"You're the trainer. Don't you know?" asked Ted.

"The only way I can think of is to bring her in and assign an Envoy to help her and guard her until she's old enough to learn the rest," Muriel said. "Oh, and see if her parents can be trained. One or both of them may have the ability and not realize it."

"That's what I thought. I think she can send, too."

"Oh, dear. We've GOT to protect her." Muriel looked up at the shocked pair beside Ted. "Are you her parents? Do you understand what Ted and I have been saying?"

"You're saying that our daughter can hear thoughts?" Dave asked.

"Exactly. And Ted thinks she can send thoughts, too. It's the first step to learning the Envoy techniques. We've just had one boy that was spontaneous like that. Unprotected, it can drive her crazy if she starts hearing too many in her head, all the time. She needs to be protected from that," Muriel said.

"Can you help her?"

"I think so." Muriel took a deep breath and let it out. "I think what we need is someone to stay with her, constantly. To act as a shield for her mind, and to watch for the possibility of other talents coming out," she finally said. "We need an Envoy to stay with her. Someone that's her age, or a little more – well, appears to be, anyway. She wouldn't really be that age. Mata?"

"Coming," Mata said. "That young would be tough. Oh, we could do it, but we might lose some of the fine control we'd need to help her. But she looks up to you. Let's see if she'll take to an Envoy that looks about your age, but is more mature."

"Mata!" Muriel said, with her hands on her hips, and growled. And Mata chuckled.

"Don't sweat it, Muriel. You're plenty mature for what you have to do. I have someone in mind that can help. And . . . Hi, Brenda."

"Hi . . . Matthew?" the newcomer said.

"Oh, dear. Now I'll have to explain my shame all over again. Yes, Brenda. But it's Mata, now."

"Oh, sorry. I just . . . I mean I hadn't seen you in a while and didn't realize . . . All right, how'd it happen," Brenda asked.

"Muriel needed someone her age, and female, to protect her and teach her. So, I became female and her age. Walked into the room and realized halfway through introducing myself that I hadn't thought about a name. So, I very intelligently said, 'Hi, I'm Matt . . . uh'. And she ran with it and I've been Mata ever since."

Dave, still near the door, started laughing and had to sit down. Helen just looked puzzled. "Envoys don't have gender," Mata explained, "because we have no bodies. What you see is simply a shell, colored and textured to look like humans. I don't know if we ever had an original shape. All I ever remember is looking human. So, changing from male to female was just a matter of . . . well, it's like changing clothes, I guess."



“So, what was Brenda?” Dave sputtered out.

Mata looked at Brenda and raised her eyebrows. “OK, OK,” Brenda finally said. I’ll tell. Bernard. Benny to most, now. And like Mata I changed because I was needed to guard and protect your daughter. Unlike Mata, I was smart enough to think of a name,” she said with a grin.

While this was going on, Muriel felt a tension. And it increased. Finally she located it, just as Hanna said, “I did it!” and collapsed.

Brenda was under her before she hit the floor. “It’s all right. She just depleted her energy. She’ll be all right. I’m sending energy to her, to bring her back up. But slowly, so as to not shock her system.” It took some minutes, but finally, Hanna was moving, then sat up.

“OW!” she said.

“Easy, little one. Easy Hanna,” Brenda said. “You used up a lot of energy doing that. So, I’m sending you some. The headache will pass in a bit.”

“But I did it. I made me glow.”

“Yes, you did. And you found out that you have limits. Making yourself glow took a lot of power. A lot of energy. And you were already low when you started. So just relax and let me send you some more, and the headache will pass,” Brenda said.

“You feel warm and fuzzy in my head.”

“I do?” Brenda said, like a statement. “I don’t think I’ve ever been described like that, before. But if that’s the way I feel to you, then I like it.”

“My name is Hanna,” she said. “Who are you?”

“My name is Brenda.”

“Are you like Muriel?”

“No. I’m an Envoy, and I’m here to protect you. Sometimes from yourself,” she said with a smile.

“Like a guardian Angel?”

“Oh, dear,” muttered Mata. “The ‘A’ word.” Dave looked sharply at her, then his mouth slowly opened. “Please, don’t say it. You’ll understand why, sometime. But not now.”

“Yes, something like that,” Brenda said. “Except that I can be more of a friend than that, if you like.” Dave was looking back and forth between Mata and Brenda, then around

the room at all the adult and child-like figures, then back to Mata. Mata just nodded. He looked at Muriel and Ted, then back to Mata.

“No, they're human. And yes, they know,” Mata said, quietly. Then he looked back at his daughter, seeming to accept this unbelievable person that was holding her. And he cried. Quiet, soft tears rolled down his cheeks, and Ted quietly handed him a handkerchief.

::Muriel,:: Brenda sent, ::I want to attach a small power tap to her. A limited one. Just enough to keep her from overtaxing herself, again.:: Muriel just gave a small nod.

Hanna looked at Brenda and said, “You're bright. And white.” She looked at Muriel. “You're kinda gray and not as bright. Same with him,” she said, looking at Ted. Then she looked at Mata. “You're kinda gray, but a lot brighter than Muriel. How come?”

“Brenda and I are Envoys. Brenda just came from Home, so she's white. I've been around Muriel for a while, so I'm a little gray. Muriel and Ted are gray because they're human. And they're not as bright because they've got bodies. Envoys don't have bodies. We just look like we do and feel like we do.”

“Mommy and daddy are gray, but they aren't bright like Muriel and Ted,” Hanna said.

“That's because they don't have the power to make them bright,” Brenda said. “That's why you fell asleep when you tried to make the glow. You don't really have the power to do that, so you pulled down your energy.”

“Oh. Will I be like Muriel and Ted some day?”

“If you like. Do you know what color you are?” asked Brenda.

“She's white,” her mother said, then covered her mouth with her hand.

“You can see souls, too,” Brenda said, softly, and smiled. “Do you ever hear your daughter in your head? It's all right, you know. Some people are born being able to use the ability.” Hanna's mother nodded. “OK, then I think that Ted and Muriel may want to talk with you about getting trained. It'll help your daughter, as she gets older. And it's nothing that you need to be afraid of. Oh, your husband, too, if he can pass the first test. Hanna,” Brenda said, gently, “I think your mother and father need a hug.”

“Dave,” Ted said, “I'd like for you and your family to come live in Enclave. Jeff could use your experience as a test driver, here, and we could put Hanna in a special school that could help her. You don't have to decide, right now, just think about it.”

“OK,” Dave said. “Let me talk to Helen about it.”

“Of course. And I think you and I need to talk about you getting the Envoy training, too. It'll help Hanna. But more importantly, it'll help you to understand her. Brenda's already said that your wife should get the training. We'll answer any questions you have about it, and help

in any way we can, too," Ted said, gently.

"What would we do with our house? It was Helen's grandmother's house."

"We can make sure that it's kept up, and everything works right, and people don't get into it. Whatever you want," Ted said.

"Why?"

"Well, part of it is for Hanna, of course. She'll be around other kids that are very much like her. But part of it is for you, too. Muriel and I have seen how hard it can be on parents that don't understand. But more important, I think you both have the ability to take the training and take a bigger place in the world," Ted said. "It'll even help with your job, if what I think is true. You're a test driver, and a good one, because you can feel what a car is doing, and know when there's a problem. And I think the reason why is because you get into the car in a way that most people can't do and don't understand. And it doesn't cost anything to take the training."

"What about Hanna?"

"Right now, she's too young to take the training. That's why Brenda's here, to act as a brake on her development. To slow it down so it doesn't overwhelm her. Also to protect her from things that might hurt her, like trying to do things that are more than she can handle, right now. And, at the same time, to help her to be comfortable with the talents she already has, and how to control them." Ted paused, then said, "Brenda's not here to take her away from you. She's here to help you to keep her safe and help her to understand. She's a friend, not a parent. She can even help you and Helen to understand things."

Dave nodded. "We're going to have to do this, aren't we?"

"Only as much as you feel you need to. Brenda won't be in the way. Of anything. But she'll be the support your daughter needs, when she needs it. The rest?" Ted asked. "Well, that's up to you. You and your wife certainly don't have to take the Envoy training, if you don't want to."

"Helen won't want to give up the house."

"So don't," Ted said. "There are two ways we can do that. Stay in the house. We can have a team in there to make sure it's in top condition, and create shields around it to help both Hanna and you and your wife. Or," Ted went on, "we'll rebuild the house, here, totally out of shields and move your family in. It takes about a day. We did it with Muriel's parents. The one you're in now will be gone over, just the same way, and then kept up for you, including making it look like it's occupied. Mail to that address will be brought here. And you can decide later what you want to do, including keeping it until Hanna is able to protect herself, then moving back in."

"You can do that?"

“Yep. No problem. Of course, the car would be in the parking lot, if you felt attached to it, or left in the driveway. Either way, it would also be gone over to make it run properly. Take the training and you wouldn't even need a car,” Ted said.

“I need to talk to Helen,” Dave said.

“Of course. Why don't we get you rooms for tonight, and let you two talk. It's a big decision, and deserves thought,” Ted said. “Talk to Jeff, too, if you want to. He went through something like this before we built offices for Muriel's friends. Still does, to some extent. Lives at home with his parents and comes in for schooling and stuff. So, he knows it from the same standpoint that Hanna would. In the mean time, you and your family are welcome to stay as long as you like. And you can let Muriel or me know whatever you decide when you're ready to make a decision.”

## Chapter 39

### A Different Way (Sunday)

Ted was met at the gate to the Medieval village by a police officer with a court order. He and all Envoys and Envoy trained humans were forbidden to be within 100 yards of the property. Ted accepted the copy of the order, and pulled his people out, then contacted Henry to let him know what had happened. Henry showed up and talked to the officer, and he, too, pulled his people out. A half hour after they left, explosions went off in the village and a number of people were seriously injured, including many children.

Ted, back in Enclave, was fuming. "This was so unnecessary," he growled. "Half an hour, and we could have had them all wrapped up and the compound safe. And what do you want to bet that we'll get a lawsuit for not protecting them!" Nobody took his bet. Good thing. Later, that afternoon, Ted and Muriel were served with summons to show cause why they didn't prevent the explosions and casualties. The way it was worded suggested that they were actually the cause of the destruction. Muriel just laughed.

"Ted," she said, "look at it this way. We have records of everything that was done, as well as the official copy of the court order keeping us away. None of our people or the FBI touched any of the materials that we removed. The only fingerprints, the very thing that they hope to use to show that we were responsible for the explosions, will be those of the perpetrators. I expect that we'll be in court no more than fifteen minutes. I also expect that the village will be shut down due to lawsuits."

"The thing that upsets me the most is that they're saying that we entered the compound illegally," he said.

"You still have the receipt for our entrance. Really, Ted, check with the lawyers. We actually have the capability to sue the village for harassment and libel. Like you keep telling me, relax and see how it plays out," Muriel said.

Neither Dave or Helen had showed up at Muriel's office during the day. Hanna had, with Brenda in tow, and had a chance to meet with Muriel's friends as well as talk with Muriel. Brenda helped keep the discussions down to the level that the six year old could handle, and Muriel noted that there was a definite bond forming. Don was a positive hit with the girl. With his practice at dealing with various age groups he was able to scale down a talk about American history to something that she could understand. And she loved the displays he put on to show events.

Ted and Muriel were still sitting in her office, in the casual area, when Dave and Helen showed up. At first, Muriel thought that they were looking for their daughter, but that was the farthest thing from their mind. They'd made their decision.

“Jeff showed me the car,” was the first thing that Dave said. “Then he told me about the education plan for those that can at least make a mental link. And the plan for those that take the full training. I could be an engineer!”

“Of course you could,” was all Muriel said, staying as neutral as possible.

“I talked to Brenda, and to some of your friends and their Envoys,” Helen said. “I already knew that I wanted Brenda to continue being Hanna's friend and mentor. What I didn't realize was the level of protection she needed. Your friends Envoys set me straight on that. Hanna could accidentally pick up things that would be beyond her, and try to do them, and either get hurt or lost. Your friends didn't have that problem, because they were older and could protect themselves.”

“But, Hanna needs limits on what she can do. Outside, with just Brenda, she'd be fielding things from outside as well as trying to monitor Hanna and keep her safe. That's just too much for one person, even an Envoy, to handle,” she added. “But I'm not sure I want to give up the house just yet. You told Dave that you could duplicate it in Enclave, and still keep up our house for us. I don't know how we'd pay for all that, but we've got to try.”

“Payment isn't a question. I told you, you'd be our guests, and guests don't pay. Period,” Ted said. “I'm glad you decided to come in, though. It WILL make it easier.”

“Um . . . ,” began Dave, “we want to take the training, too. If we're going to keep up with Hanna, we've got to be prepared. Jeff said that he can make arrangements with work for me to stay out as long as necessary to get the training. And Helen has always been pretty much a 'stay at home' wife. She has worked, but has always felt that it was wrong for her to be away from Hanna for long periods of time. Now, with Brenda to act as her protector and friend, she's not as worried about that. But still would like to stay at home. So her training shouldn't be a problem.”

“Hello, dear,” said a friendly female voice.

“Mom! Dad! Hi!”

“Oh, dear! We're disturbing something,” said Fred.

“Not at all. Come in and sit down. We just got two new recruits, and they'll be moving in, probably tomorrow or Tuesday,” Muriel said.

“You know, daughter, that the house next door to us is vacant,” her father hinted. “We wouldn't mind the company.”

“I'm sorry if I seem rude,” Helen said, “but you really are Muriel's parents?”

“Oh, yes. And you're not being rude. Considering the circumstances, the question is actually quite reasonable. There was a spat of trouble that could have slopped over onto us, so we came in. They even duplicated our house for us. Oh, by the way, young lady, I hope

you didn't leave anything in the old one. It's been sold. Anyway, once we got here and saw what Enclave was like, we decided to stay. Later we got the training, and now we're just gadabouts, going everywhere we want without problems," her father said.

"Mommy! I got to see how clothes are made, here," a little whirlwind said, running to her mother and hugging her.

"Manners, Hanna," said her mother. "There are people here that don't know that our little savage can act grown up."

"I'm sorry. Hi, Muriel, hi, Ted," she said to each in turn, then turned to Muriel's parents. "Hi, I'm Hanna. Who are you?"

"I'm Fred White, and this is my wife, Lily. We're Muriel's parents." Hanna turned and looked at Muriel, who nodded.

"It's nice to meet you, Mister and Missus White. Mom," Hanna said with an abrupt about face in conversation, "Brenda says she'll teach me how to make my own clothes, someday."

"We'll talk," Brenda said to Hanna's mother. "Before anything happens, we'll talk, so you have a say in what happens, when."

"How about now?" her father asked.

"If you wish," Brenda said. "Hanna needs her own protection. It won't be perfect at first, but the sooner she learns how to make shields and learns how to use them the easier it will be for her. For that, she needs her own power source. I'm supplying a trickle, right now, to keep her from depleting herself again. So, that's two things that she needs. I can block her going any further than that, and I can help her understand the use of power, shields, and being able to send. But the quicker we can get her to be her own protection, the safer she'll be."

"How dangerous is it? I mean the power and such," asked David.

"Very. That's why it's done under the shields of an Envoy or trainer. Preferably more than one. Once she's under her own shields and comfortable with them, the danger falls off to less than her walking down the street alone, to go to school. And I can reduce that a lot. Ideally, I'd have her under four squads, and even then I'd worry if she didn't have her own protection," Brenda said.

"An Envoy, just like a human, can be distracted. Under her own shields, no one would be able to grab her," she added. "Muriel, would you care to demonstrate?"

Muriel stepped out from her chair and faced Hanna's parents. A figure appeared behind her and aimed a baseball bat at her head. It never connected. It just stuck a foot away from her. Then the figure tried to grab her from the side. And stuck, one foot from her

body.

“Why, Don! I didn't know you were stuck on me?”

“Gonna let me go, now?” Don asked.

“Oh, I don't know. I think you'd look good as an ornament.”

“Yea, but it's going to get embarrassing for you when you take a shower,” he said with a grin.

“Good point,” Muriel said, and let him go.

“Hi, beanpole,” Don said.

“Hi, pumpkin,” Hanna replied, and ran over and hugged him. “Mommy, Don makes the most amazing things. He was teaching me about history, and he made it look real.”

“Don is a teacher, a trainer, a troublemaker, and my official bat boy. That trick with the baseball bat is how we test shields on someone that gets trained. It's effective two ways. It shows that the person's shield is up to full force, and it shows the person that they can't be hurt if the shield is up,” Muriel said. “Plus, there's a variation of it that's charged by power. It can knock an assailant out, and leave him or her with nasty burns. I doubt that Brenda will be teaching her that one, though.”

“Not until she's at least twelve, and as mature as your friends were,” Brenda said. “But she won't need that. I know her mind, and can find her, anyplace. So I can just translate her back to me with no problem, as long as she's conscious and under shield.”

“When would you teach her,” Helen asked, a worried look on her face.

“Ideally, sometime this week,” Brenda said.

“How about today?” Helen looked positively anxious. “I don't mean to push you, but if she's as vulnerable as you seem to imply, I'd rather she have all the protection she can get just as soon as possible.”

“OK,” Brenda said, and turned to Muriel. “I'm going to cheat. Once she has the power to sustain a mental send, I'm going to teach her shielding by sending her a dump. I've talked to Betty about it. What it does is to put it in her mind so it works subconsciously. I'll have to make it conscious for her, afterward, as we go along. But this would give her the basic shield and how to use it almost instinctively. Is that all right with you?”

“Brenda, when we put you in charge, we put you in charge. And you already know the down side – it being instinctive rather than conscious – and understand that you'll have to change it later. But will it work that way?”



"Betty seems to think so. And she checked with the bright boys of Home, and they agree. It's not recommended for adults. But for one so young, it might be the best way to do it."

"Then I see no problem with making that change," Muriel said. "Shields, people. We've got a youngling to protect."

Brenda sat cross legged on the floor. "OK, Hanna, we're going to play a little head game. Then, someday may turn into tomorrow. Or even today, if you like. You want to make your own clothes?"

"YEA!" shouted her ward.

"Good. Then I want you to look down and close your eyes. Pretend that there's a great big tunnel going straight down right in front of you. It's a long, long tunnel, and there's a little white light at the other end. See it?" Hanna nodded. "Good. Call to that light. Tell it you need it." And that suddenly, Hanna lit up like a neon sign.

"Now, Hanna," Brenda sent as well as said, "I'm going to send something to your mind. Open your eyes and look at one spot for a few seconds."

"Here, beanpole, look at my finger. Just stare at it for a little bit," Don said, sitting in front of her when she turned to find a blank spot. She did what he said, and a few seconds later the glow around the girl dimmed slightly, then picked back up.

"It's done, and it took hold," Brenda said. "What do you think, Don?"

"I'd like to test it, but it looks all right," he said, taking his finger away. "Hanna, do you remember what I did with Muriel? With the baseball bat?"

"Uh, huh."

"I'd like to test your shield the same way. It'll never touch you. You won't even feel it. OK?"

"Really?"

"Really. Just close your eyes," he said, standing up. When they were closed, he pulled his bat out of his 'no pocket' and swung at her head. The bat stopped and stuck a foot away. He even let go of it to show her parents that she had stopped it. "OK, now look."

"That's a funny place for a bat," Hanna said, and she 'let go of it' when Don went to take it.

"That was VERY good, Hanna. Now, nothing can touch you unless you want it to," Brenda said. "Oh, and there's something else. What do you see," she added as a mirror appeared beside her.

"I glow. Like you do," Hanna said. "But mommy and daddy don't glow like that. Theirs is dimmer and doesn't sparkle."

"That's it?" asked Dave.

"Yep. For right now. I'll have to teach her to do it consciously, but she'll enjoy that because I'll be doing it by teaching her to make her own clothes. Anything from plain play clothes to fancy dress." Brenda looked at Helen and said, "You're more than welcome to watch that and make suggestions about clothing appropriate to her. In fact, I'd appreciate it if you would. It would help me, tremendously."

"Um . . .," Dave said, then looked at his wife. She looked a little scared, but nodded.

"Yes, we can teach you, too. Even teach you together, if you like. All except the part about making your own clothes. Those we do with gender specific trainers," Muriel said. "And, of course, there are things that we won't teach you in front of Hanna. She'll learn those when she's older and better able to handle the responsibilities."

It took a half hour and both Ted and Muriel doing the training, and that included the 'knock-knock' of making a mental link. But Dave and Helen shared their daughter's accomplishment, and were grinning. They even glowed like Hanna, which she remarked on. And Muriel felt the shields go down on her office, and realized that it wasn't just the trained people in the casual area, but all of her squads that had locked down the room.

Then it was clothing time, and the party was split up. Ted in his apartment with Dave, and Muriel in her apartment with Helen. In the mean time, Don and Brenda kept Hanna occupied with doing simple things with shields, and in the process teaching her how to create her own. First, it was little things, like a ball or a top. Then it got a little more complicated, like a floppy-eared stuffed dog, with fuzzy fur and tongue stuck out. Then 'no pockets', and Hanna found that she could pull anything that was hers out of one. She was having so much fun that she didn't realize how much work it was. So much fun that she almost missed her parents returning to Muriel's casual area.

"Mommy! Look what I made!" Hanna said, running to her.

"Oh, my! That's pretty good. What about Teddy, though?"

"When we go home, I'll have both. Besides, this one has fur, and Teddy doesn't," Hanna said.

"Teddy's a dog?" asked Brenda. Dave just covered his face.

"Yea. He's Teddy Bare," Hanna replied, and Ted understood why Dave was covering his face.

"That was your fault, wasn't it," Ted said to Dave.

Dave nodded. "We picked it up at a garage sale. Had to do some re-stuffing. I think it went through three generations of kids, but Hanna loved it. I suppose the new one will have to be called Fuzzy Wuzzy."

"Don't," Ted said. "Or don't you remember the nursery rhyme?"

"You're right. Maybe I'd better stay out of naming this one," Dave said. "All right, young lady, who's going to carry that dog back to your room?" Hanna promptly put it in a 'no pocket', and grinned devilishly at him. "Imp," he said, ruffling her hair.

# Chapter 40

## The Hearing (Monday morning)

"I have the most amazing collection of paperwork, here, that I've seen in a long time," the judge said. It was just after nine o'clock in the morning, and the judge had made it clear that this hearing would not be as formal as some might. "On the one hand, I have an accusation of fraudulent activity resulting in personal injury and property damage. The accusation is supported only by the sworn statement of the administrator of the Medieval village. On the other hand I have a sworn statement by the leaders of Home, and this is backed up by eight video accounts that all support it, as well as the sworn statements of FBI agents, fingerprint records, statements by individuals that match the fingerprints, and a court order keeping the leaders of Home and anyone with what is called Envoy training from coming within one hundred yards of the Medieval village."

"Now," the judge went on, "the most interesting part of this is that I also have a copy of a contract with the Federal government and Enclave. This contract requests the assistance of Enclave in investigating potential terrorist activities in this country, and providing such aid as they are able. Now, that's a very open ended style of contract, and I have to presume that the government knew what it was doing when it made that contract, especially since it specifies the use of Envoys and those with Envoy training in accomplishing these tasks. I'd like to know more about this training, and how it differs from what Envoys, themselves, can do."

"Your honor," Alice Wilson said, "we are prepared to answer your questions to your satisfaction."

"Objection! Your honor, this has nothing to do with our complaint," said the opposing attorney.

"Over ruled," the judge said in a bored voice. "As it stands right now, I'm prepared to rule in favor of Enclave and the leaders of Home based on the fact that they include factual evidence, where you have nothing to support your claim. However, the nature and purpose of this training may shed further light on the veracity of these pieces of evidence."

"Miss Wilson," he continued, "how do you propose to demonstrate this training?"

"Your honor, with your permission, we would like to demonstrate how shields work to protect people, and how Envoys and those with the training are able to cover distances with no time lapse for traveling," said Alice.

"Very well, proceed."

As Alice and Muriel proceeded around the table, Alice said, "One application of shields

is personal protection.” She drew a baseball bat out of a 'no pocket' and promptly tried to hit Muriel in the head.

“Everybody aims for the head. Why is that?” muttered Muriel.

“Another application is that shields can be colored and textured.” Alice turned to Muriel and asked her to turn her personal shield a transparent pink.

“Pink,” Muriel shuddered, but did as she was asked.

“I take it you have something against pink, young lady?” the judge asked.

“Blue is all right, even green or yellow. But pink is a girl's color,” Muriel replied.

“Objection! Your honor, this person is making a mockery of the court!” exclaimed the opposing attorney.

“Really? I thought she was making a mockery of the color pink. Over ruled. And now I can see the shape of the shield around her,” the judge replied.

“As for traveling distances without any laps in time,” Alice said, and turned to Muriel. “Would you please go to that side of the room, to the judge's right, pause five seconds, then go to the other side of the room in front of the jury box, pause five seconds, then come back here?” asked Alice.

Muriel promptly disappeared, and was at one side of the room. She appeared to be counting to herself, then disappeared and was at the other side of the room. Another five seconds and she was back beside Alice.

“As you can see, Your Honor, there is no travel time involved in translating from place to place. If a trained person knows where she is going, has an image of it, or even just a location that she can mentally scan, she can travel there with no elapsed travel time,” Alice said.

“Another application of the training involves the ability to talk to each other without verbal speech. I'm not sure how we could demonstrate that for you, Your Honor,” Alice said. “However, another application is the ability to use the anchor one has for one's personal shield to enable one to fly.” She turned to Muriel. “If you would, please? The same course but in the air. You are allowed to avoid the ceiling fans.” Muriel complied, slaloming around the three fans in such a way that she covered all sides of them, then returned to her place.

“One of the applications of shields that I can't demonstrate, here, is the ability to create them inside out in order to contain explosions,” Alice said.

“Just how strong are they? I mean, I saw this young lady's shield withstand a baseball bat. But just how strong is it, really?” asked the judge.

"May I, Your Honor?" asked Muriel.

"If you can clear the matter up, then by all means. Oh, and may I have your name?"

"I beg your pardon, Your Honor. I thought you knew. My name is Muriel, and I'm the Leader of Home and Ambassador to the people of earth." The judge's jaw dropped, and a gasp came from the opposition's table.

"Then, you're an Envoy?" the judge finally asked.

"Oh, no sir. I'm very much human, and my parents are currently living in Enclave," she replied. "As to the strength of the shields, I was the first human to be trained in the Envoy techniques. And one of my security squads shot me. My father still has the five bullets that I picked out of my shield. There are records of other, um, incidents that would demonstrate just how powerful shields are, if you care to view them. They've even been on television."

"I'll take your word for it, at this point," the judge said. "However, there are two other matters. The complaint says something about your causing a little girl to collapse by performing some sort of magic trick involving changing clothes."

"Your Honor," Alice said, "the young girl in question was Muriel, and she collapsed due to her own efforts. She was attempting to handle too much, and didn't watch her energy levels. The lack of energy caused the collapse. One of Muriel's group is a doctor who was immediately on the scene, discovered the problem and restored her energy level."

"The complaint says nothing about a doctor. It only says that some young girl was pestering her when she was on the ground," the judge said.

"I believe that the exact term was, 'a young girl in some sort of white clothing', Your Honor. That girl's presence wasn't requested by the court, but, if she isn't currently busy, I think she'd be willing to appear. Would you like Muriel to ask her?" Alice asked.

"Yes, please."

"Fran," Muriel said, and said for the court, "are you busy right now? Answer audibly, please."

"I think I've got a few minutes, Muriel," Fran replied. "The bumps and scrapes crowd seems to have settled down. What do you need?"

"Would you be so kind as to join me, here, in court?"

"OK," Fran said, appearing beside Muriel. "What's up?"

"Young lady," the judge said, "Would you identify yourself, please?"

"Of course, Your Honor. My name is Fran, and I've had the doctorate level courses

offered by the University of Home in Medicine, Psychology and Psychiatry, and am certified in each of those by the Medical Board of Home as being fully qualified to practice. The University of Home, by the way, has recently been accredited as qualified to award doctorate level degrees by the Secretary of Education."

"And, you've been here all this time, during this hearing?"

"No, Your Honor," Fran said. "I was across the hall from my office in Enclave, talking with Don when Muriel asked me to come here."

"Is this Don also a doctor?" asked the judge.

"Oh, no. He's a teacher, trainer, troublemaker and bat boy," Fran said.

"Troublemaker and bat boy?"

"Oh, nothing malicious. He's always been the joker among us kids and was always getting into trouble. As for 'bat boy', he's the one that most often tests the shield of new trainees," Fran said. "Ted gave us a building with our own offices in order to allow space for our squads. There's twelve of us kids in there, each with a squad of five Envoys."

"My head is beginning to spin with all this. It seems unbelievable. And all kids!" the judge said.

"Well, not all kids. Our law office is all trained in Envoy techniques. Even the paralegals, secretaries and receptionist. Then there's the Secret Service, FBI, and all the military services that have trained people," Fran said.

"OK, now what's this about clothes?" asked the judge.

"Muriel, would you cycle through some changes, please," asked Alice. Muriel did, starting with the jeans and shirt that she wore to the village, and ending with her Class 'A' uniform. "Clothing is another application of shields, allowing one that is trained to be able to change clothes instantly, and always be wearing clean, crisp looking outfits. Even shoes will remain polished."

"Hmm," the judge said. "I believe we've gone through all the allegations listed in this complaint. Does the plaintiff have any evidence to support its claim?"

"Your Honor," the opposition attorney said, "I've given you all that we have."

"Very well, at this time I'm prepared to issue a summary judgment for the defense. The plaintiff has brought no evidence to back up its claim of damages caused by the defense. On the other hand, the defense has supplied ample evidence that they acted in good faith and judgment, and were precluded from further acting by the actions of the plaintiff. As a result, I find for the defense in summary judgment, and this judgment is with prejudice. Does your client understand what that means?" he asked the opposition attorney.

The attorney whispered to the client for a moment, when the client suddenly yelled, "You can't do this! There has to be a trial."

"Madam, there has been. You have made allegations. But allegations do not constitute evidence. On the other hand, the defense has offered evidence of their actions that refute your allegations. You are, therefore, forbidden from attempting to bring this action again. I am seriously tempted to sanction you and your attorney for having brought a frivolous action. This case is closed. The written judgment will be sent to you sometime this week. You are excused. I would ask that the defense stay for a moment."

After the village administrator and her attorney had left the courtroom, the judge asked Muriel, "What does it take to get the training in Envoy techniques?"

"There is a requirement," Muriel said. "A trainee has to be able to make a mental link. This is because much of the training is done through that link, and all of it is monitored through that link. If a trainee can do that, then we will do everything in our power to see to it that the trainee succeeds. We have yet to have someone come to us that could make the mental link and could NOT pass the training."

"OK, how long, and how much, and where," the judge asked.

"It can take as little as a half a day, or as much as four days. So far, those are the extremes of the training period. Training doesn't cost anything, and we include room, board, any medical that's necessary, and a human or Envoy of the appropriate gender for that portion of the training that requires it. We have trained people outside Enclave, but it's easier on us to do it in Enclave, where we have all the facilities and the availability of Envoys for support," Muriel said. "If you decide to try, let us know and we'll provide transportation."

"Why? Why are you doing this?" the judge asked.

"There is a consensus," Ted said, "among the Envoys that humans were meant to have the training all along. I won't get into all the details. At this point you wouldn't understand them. They have felt, for a long time, that humans were created to give Envoys a way to learn to be creative and to make good judgments. There appears to be some evidence to support it. So, it isn't so much what Envoys are giving humans as it is what humans are giving Envoys by interacting with them on their level."

"I don't understand . . .," the judge said.

"Until recently, Envoy society – if you want to call it that – was static. There was very little change, and most of that wasn't good," Ted said. "Humans have existed for a long time, you know. But, until recently there was very little or no contact between humans and Envoys. Recent information leads us to believe that the Envoys had a hand in creating humans, and that the intention was that they be trained and there be a great deal more interaction between them. Much like what you see in Enclave. Somehow, that got stopped early in the development of humans, and it's only recently – the past two years or so – that they've again



been able to take up the task.”

“You're implying that Envoys created humans. What about what religions say?”

“Religions,” Ted said, “are a tool of humans. A tool that has become the master. Religion, originally, was meant to provide an explanation for what was otherwise unexplainable. Religions have no relation to what actually happened.”

“I'm not sure I like that position,” the judge said.

“Then, I recommend that you never take the training,” Ted said, sadly.

The judge shook his head. “And I so wanted to meet Envoys.”

“Oh, well, that's easily done. Mata, bring the squad down,” Muriel said. Above the seats, at the back of the room, six Envoys appeared, and slowly flew down to stand near Muriel.”

“Bart, better bring yours, or the judge will get the wrong impression,” Ted said.

“Children in yours, both male and female,” the judge said to Muriel, “but only men in yours,” he said to Ted. “Bias?”

“No, not really. Muriel was more used to working with mixed genders than I was. Oh, and two of her squads appear to be adult,” Ted said.

“Envoys have no actual gender,” Mata said, “because we have no bodies. What you see is actually just an application of shields. We're just souls.”

“No bodies. But humans have bodies.” Suddenly, the judge's eyebrows went up and his chin dropped. “You think that humans are nothing more than Envoy souls in a physical body!”

“To give some of us experience in change,” Mata said. “I wish Ted hadn't danced around it so much. He made it much more mysterious than it really is. Even we Envoys that are interacting with humans are changing, some. It comes from trying to keep up with them. Especially Muriel.”

“Wait a minute! I thought Ted was the Leader of Home.”

“He was,” Muriel said. “But that's leader, not ruler. Envoys follow whom they choose. Ted was first. He gave them a direction and the administrative ability to set up Enclave. Then I came along and took the training.”

“She came along and took us all for a wild ride, is more like it,” Ted said. “In two years I'd only managed to get one person trained. In a handful of months, she's gotten close to a thousand trained. She provided the spark to make it happen, and made changes along the

way, including training her friends from school, creating new shield structure, and making us fly. She also showed the world what can be done with Envoy training – how it can be the ultimate defense. I'm not unhappy with the switch. I'm still A leader of Home. I do what I'm good at, and she's still carrying on in the direction I saw as a possibility for the Envoys and humans."

"But it still means the end of religion," the judge said.

"Would you rather believe? Or know for certain?" Muriel asked. "It destroys religion as a means of keeping people subservient to a few greedy people. It ends it as a belief, because when you KNOW something, there's no longer any reason for a belief. I would like to think that it can still be used to help shape ethical behavior for those that can't take the training at this time."

"You wanted to know what Envoys were like," Mata said, changing the subject. "And we're here. If I turn off the deflection on my shield, you'll see for yourself that Envoys have no body." And she held out her hand. The judge took it, or tried to. His hand passed through Mata's without resistance. "So, now you know. I'm real, and can shape a body any way I want. But I have no actual body of my own, which is the reason you couldn't see me or any of the Envoys until Muriel called us down. With that particular shield turned off, we're invisible." And she suited actions to words and went invisible, slowly, then came back.

"You are a judge," Mata said. "And that means that you have to determine facts as balanced with law. Do you do that with your own life?"

"I try. Probably not as well as I should, but I do try, if I understand what you mean," he replied.

"If you can look honestly at yourself and try to atone for wrongs you've done, then you're balanced. And that's the judgment you face when you go to Home. And, as Ted says, everyone goes Home sooner or later. Those with the training go there sooner, while still alive and in their bodies, and do it under their own power," Mata said. "That's the distinction between a human, a trainee, and an Envoy."

"You're saying that we judge ourselves?"

"Yes," said Mata, with a hint of finality.

"I'm going to have to think about this," the judge said.

"Of course," Muriel said, and handed him her business card. "If you choose to try for the training, or even if you just want to come and visit Enclave, call me. If I'm busy, it may be picked up by Mata or one of my on-duty squad. Doesn't matter. We'll have someone come and translate you directly to Enclave, to save you time and the exhaustion of travel. And now," Muriel added, "we'd better be going. We have things to do, and you don't need us tying up your time." After appropriate good-byes and best wishes, Muriel, Ted and their squads translated back to Enclave.

# Chapter 41

## Respect

(Monday afternoon)

Muriel and Mata, and the squad, translated directly from the courtroom to Muriel's office. Alice had already gone back to her office, once she realized that the talk the judge wanted to have had nothing to do with the case. Chuck was just serving coffee to a rather stunned looking Dave and Helen in her casual area. Muriel went directly there and seated herself as Chuck brought her a cup, too.

"OK, I take it that you spent the morning learning how to translate, then went to Home and back. Any problems?" Muriel asked.

"No," Dave said. "The Envoys from the Guest House found out, or realized, that we were in training, and took over for you. They had us bouncing all over Enclave, first. Then gave us the image and the twist for getting to Home. They didn't tell us about the judgment, though."

"We've found that it's kinder that way, for most people," Muriel said. "But, now that you've made it, you're full-fledged Citizens of Home." And once again Muriel got to apply stripes and administer Home passports to trainees, grinning as she did so. "So, what's happening with your daughter?" she asked, as Hanna's parents began to relax down, some.

"Well, we do have a concern," Helen said. "I don't think Hanna should be subjected to Home. At least not at this age."

"I agree," said Muriel. "And so does Brenda. She won't even be taught to translate, and any attempts will be blocked until she's about twelve and can demonstrate the responsibility to handle it. I will say this, though. It is easier on younger people than it is on adults, mainly because younger people have less imbalance than adults do. But without the level of responsibility . . . nope. Just not gonna happen."

"How do you know this? I mean, I'm not trying to question you . . .," Helen said.

"Yes, you are. And rightly so," Muriel responded, smiling. "I'm basing it on my own reactions and that of my friends, compared to adults that we've trained that appeared to us to be pretty well balanced. Some of them were hit hard. Others sailed through it. But my friends ALL sailed through it, almost not noticing that it was there. In a sense, about twelve years of age is the best time to experience it."

"I'll add something, without any names. A fourteen year old girl came to me and wanted training, and I gave it to her. Then her ten year old brother wanted the training, and both Ted and I refused. But, to be fair we asked Mark for his advice. Mark, at that time, was the only doctor in Enclave using Envoy techniques. He about took our scalps off for even

suggesting it, and only calmed down when he realized that we'd already vetoed it," Muriel said with a grin. "No, there will be a major discussion between you both and Ted and I, and maybe Fran, and of course Brenda before we even teach her to translate, much less take the trip to Home."

"OK, I've got a question," Dave said. "We watched Brenda teach Hanna how to make clothes, then ran her through a bunch. The ones that Hanna selected to make were her favorites, of course. But that included play clothes as well as the sorts of school clothes she would wear on days when she didn't have gym. If she wears good clothes to school and switches for gym class, then the other kids are going to wonder about her, and maybe pick on her."

"Good point," said Muriel. "We have a solution. Enroll her here. First of all, we can put her with others like her that have only the first level training. That will take care of the 'picking on' problem, because it isn't tolerated in that group, and the Envoys really enforce it. Second, she'll get a more in-depth course of study because it's put directly in her mind. And believe me, that works. She'll have the equivalent of a high school diploma when she's twelve, and can go on to college doctorate courses after that. She'll also go on field trips that show her what various jobs are like, and how they relate to the education level she has. We believe in showing the kids how things connect as much as possible, and especially how they connect to the real world."

"How did you manage to get that approved?" Dave said.

"Long story. It started with Ted getting approval for me to be home-schooled due to things that were going on at the time. I was being shot at. But then I trained my friends, and he pushed to get them schooled here, too. The city finally agreed, but demanded that we be 'base-line' tested, only they pulled a fast one. The test covered material that was three years beyond where we should have been. And we pulled a fast one. All of my friends and I had had 'booster' dumps that actually took us three years beyond our grade. When we started up to the desk for the computer to grade the tests and were getting one hundred percent on the first test, the proctor let slip that we shouldn't have been able to do that, and why," Muriel said.

"Well, that started an unholy war right there. I grabbed her and Mata and I visited the school superintendent and exposed the mess. The proctor was fired, as were most of the school board. This, by the way, was after I'd had the school that my friends and I attended closed due to the amount of harassment and bullying that was going on and condoned by the teachers and principal. Anyway, we went back and took the rest of the tests, and aced all but one. On that one, without collaborating, we all found that two questions didn't have any of the multiple guesses right, and the answer the computer would have accepted was dead wrong. So, we all wrote it up, along with what the right answer was, and cited sources, and I took them back to the superintendent. Based on the fact that we were getting a better education from the Envoys than the school system offered, we were declared accredited, and are actually part of the city school system as an alternate school," she said, and grinned.

"And that," she went on, "started our campaign to have the University of Home, a curious fiction that quickly became a reality, accredited. And if you want to meet the total

faculty of the University of Home, I'll call Betty and her squad over. They're back there in the break room."

Dave started laughing, and Helen just looked puzzled. "You're scamming the system!" Dave said.

"Of course. However, unlike a real scam, we're actually providing more value, rather than less or none. How would you like a doctorate for one hundred dollars, and a total time of two days. Oh, and that includes not only the PhD, but the license to go with it?" Muriel asked sweetly. Dave laughed for a full two minutes before he could get himself back under control.

"Is it legal?" Helen asked.

"Oh, now, that's the scam part. Yes, it's as legal as anything in this country. There are holes in the laws big enough to drive a tractor-trailer through. We just took advantage of one of those holes. It seems that, when all the excessive wordage is eliminated, the responsibility for accreditation in this country is either done by various private and very biased boards, or by the Secretary of Education. It just so happens that he was here to talk to us about complaints he'd had about our running an unaccredited university. He walked into the office and had a heart attack. His heart stopped. His regular doctor had said that his next one would be his last, as he'd had a few before," Muriel said, then thought for a bit.

"Somebody, or some bodies, grabbed him before he even hit the floor. I flattened this recliner into a pretty good semblance of an operating table and Fran and two of her squad, both doctors, were around it as soon as he was placed on it. One doctor oxygenated the blood and kept it circulating. The other started removing blockages, strengthening arteries, and removing stents. Fran worked on the heart, repairing it and strengthening it, then went all over his body checking to be sure that everything else was up to standards. When she was sure, and sure that he wouldn't be hurting when he came to, she passed a bit of power across his heart to restart it. Elapsed time just over five minutes," she said.

"Needless to say, he WALKED out of the office. And all it lacked was the paperwork for the University of Home to be accredited. We have that paperwork in the lawyers office. And a bunch of universities have two years to clean up their act and get their material up to date or lose their accreditation. I don't think they'll make it," Muriel added. "Oh, and in addition, the Secretary of Education is Envoy trained, now, too."

"And this was legal?" asked Helen.

"Perfectly. Their rules. We just made use of them in an unexpected way," Muriel replied.

"But won't they try to close the holes in their rules?" Helen persisted.

"Yep. But those rules are Federal, and recent developments will make it harder for biased laws to be passed. There's an old saying," Muriel said, "that there's no such thing as fair. And looking at the way laws are enacted – serving a small part of society in order to

make them rich, or even just to provide a guaranteed income for them – I can see where people would come to that conclusion. But it's all just bullying, cheating, and lying. I'm trying to level the playing field and MAKE things fair for the little person.”

“I was at a hearing, today,” she added, “where some very important people in the State of Washington tried to force a trial based solely on accusations without any substance – they provided NO evidence of wrong-doing. We supplied evidence refuting all the accusations and a motion for summary judgment was entered based on that. The court ruled in our favor. Were we bullies?” she asked. “Yep. Bigger bullies than they were. But we worked within the law that the opposition was simply trying to manipulate. In the process we stepped up the action a little more. We caused them to look foolish, at least to themselves, which will make them angry. So, now they'll come after us – and by 'us' I don't mean people like you. I mean people like Ted and I, and our squads, because we look important to them.”

“I don't know how they'll come after us,” Muriel said. “Actually, how they do it will tell us a lot about them. And this time, when we stop them we'll roll them up – find the head of the snake and pull its fangs. And the world gets that little bit fairer – more just. And laws get made or changed to reflect that. A shift in the political structure of the world.”

“It's a game to you,” Dave said.

“A very serious game, but yes, it's a game. Much like chess but played on a vastly larger playing field. And we're going after one group of players at a time by making them come to us. And that, too, is part of the game. As long as the opposition looks like they're the aggressors we have the people behind us, and more come to be trained. And the balance shifts,” Muriel said with a grin.

“And, you enjoy it,” he said. “We saw the records of some of what you did. Is that what Hanna's going to be doing?”

“I doubt it. It's possible, but not probable. And we're certainly not training her to think like that. Brenda's biggest task is to protect her from herself – to allow her to grow in her own way and not be forced the way I was. She'll find her own place in society, not be thrust into it.”

Dave looked at Helen, then back at Muriel. “When you taught us to find power,” he said, “you said some things. That Envoys are attached to power, but humans have to find it. That Envoys are soul, but humans are soul in a body. It wasn't like I had to search for power. It was more like it was waiting for me to acknowledge it and ask it to join me.”

“Yes,” Muriel said.

“Humans aren't really different than Envoys, are we,” he said.

“Nope. Not really. That's why humans can be trained.”

“I'm going to ask a ridiculous question,” Helen said, leaning forward. “Can you fly?”

"Yes," Muriel said, and lifted herself out of her seat and, still in a seated position, flew around the room, slowly, then settled back in her recliner.

"I mean, with wings."

Muriel grinned at the woman. "Wings were never used for flying. They were simply an effect to create awe in the minds of humans. In fact, there have been times when wings weren't used. Then they looked just like anyone else." Muriel watched the woman take in this half-revelation. At first, she appeared to just be trying to sort it all out. Then her eyes widened, and her mouth opened, then shut. She leaned back against the back of the couch, and looked at her husband. He appeared to have come to the same conclusion. And Mata walked into the casual area.

"Mata?" Muriel asked.

"I'll clean up, Muriel. You don't have to say it," Mata said, attracting Hanna's parents attention. She slowly grew to adult size and proportions, a striking lady in a gray uniform. Then changed to a tall, ruggedly handsome man in a gray uniform. And then added wings. "Like this, Helen? Is this what you wanted to see?"

"Almost," she said. Then turned and looked at Muriel.

"Go ahead, Muriel. Show her," Mata said.

"Yes, Muriel," Ted said from the entrance, "they've gone this far. Finish it." Mata, in the mean time had resumed her now normal appearance. Muriel sighed and looked resigned, then stood up – and continued to stand up until her height was just under the ceiling but her body was still that of a child. Then the wings appeared, and she glowed.

"This is what you wanted to see. But, before you get the wrong idea, I'm human. A soul in a body," she said, resuming her normal appearance and retaking her seat. "Actually, anyone with the training can do what I just did. Maybe even better."

"I have a friend at work. He just got out of the service – Marine Corps. He's what we call a 'dirty hands' engineer. He likes to get in and actually work on the cars," Dave said. "When Jeff showed up, that first day, in casual clothes and with nothing I could see that identified him as having training, all of a sudden it was like old home week for the two. And I could see stripes, like you just put on Helen and I. And he had a passport like mine, but the declaration on it said 'Protector of the Children of Home'. He said it was something special that Marines got in their passports, but wouldn't know why."

"He probably didn't know why," Ted said, quietly. "We were just beginning to know, ourselves, when we started that."

"I think I know who the Children of Home are," Dave said. "I think they're actually Envoy souls in a body. You. Me. Us. All of us, we're the Children of Home."

"That's the way it's beginning to look," Ted said. "And that's why we have to do this, Muriel and I. Why we train others, and help them to train still more people. Why we stand on the front line and make targets of ourselves. I did it, originally, in rage at the injustice in the world. Muriel did it because she can't stand bullies, heh, as if you hadn't noticed."

"Do you really think that you can do it? Straighten the world out?" Dave asked.

"We have to try. For as long as we can, anyway," Muriel said.

"Don't quit," Dave said. "Don't ever quit. Never, never, never. I'll do what I can to help. Just ask."

"You already are. You're raising a daughter. And you're trained, yourself, and will be using that training in your job," Muriel said. "Ted and I, we're out at the sharp, pointy end of the stick. So are those actually in the military or police that have the training. Your friend recognized Jeff because he could see his stripes, even if nobody else there could. Just as Jeff could see your friend's. And, with his age and where Jeff was coming from, your friend knew that he had to have been one of the first trained. Some of my friends will stay out at the sharp point, I think. Others, I already know, will move to more support areas or even back into civilian life as much as they can. Just having the training doesn't mean that you're automatically out there making a target of yourself. Same with your wife and daughter."

"We pushed to get you trained because you'll be better able to help your daughter grow into hers," Ted said. "And she needed to be trained. She was showing signs of discovering it on her own, without protection. We haven't lied to you, and we haven't put you out there as a target. We need to get more of the general population trained. You are just two more. No strings attached."

"Still . . . ."

"Nope. You're a family. That's enough. What ever else you do, do it because you want to, not because you feel you owe us. You don't. If anything, we owe you, for having put your daughter in training so early, and not really giving you a choice. If you need us, you know how to get ahold of us. So does Brenda. And, I'd bet your daughter does, too. Plus, if you're still interested in living here, in Enclave, it'll be even easier for you," Muriel said.

"I think we'd better," Dave said, "if you don't mind. I have a feeling that we may need all the help we can get with Hanna."

"Then you'll have it," she replied. "All the help you need. And no, we'll never quit."



# Epilogue

## Is This the End?

Life isn't like a book, with neat beginnings and ends. It doesn't have plots and heroes and villains. Life is a process, and sometimes the loose ends just don't get tied up, neatly. So, you can believe that this is not the end for Muriel and friends. And, you can believe that Muriel just doesn't quit.

But in life, things change – people change. Sometimes people grow and mature, sometimes they stagnate. And sometimes they fall back to previous behavior. This has been a story of growth, of seeing injustice and abuse in one country and trying to do something about it. This has been a story of one exceptional person given the opportunity to grow and mature, and make a difference.

This is also the end of this story.

But not the end of Muriel and her friends.

# Never, Never, Never Quit Cheat Sheet

## References and . . . well . . . references

(Source material for some of the odd-ball things I've put in the book)

Chapter 11, pg. 70: 'First Cause'. This is a nasty reference, and should tell you, as nothing else might (Yea, right!) that ALL of these books are philosophical. The term goes back to Aristotle, and was later used by religiosities for the theological argument for the existence of god. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primum\\_movens](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primum_movens), “When applied in his physics, this led to the view that all natural motions are uncaused and therefore self-explanatory.[2] Given that [causality](#) is linear, causality or motion must be finally attributed to a *first cause*, which logically cannot itself be moved, i. e., the unmoved mover. To Aristotle the first cause is energy or [energeia](#) (in Greek) or [actus](#) (in Latin): energy causes motion.” Beginning to sound a bit like Muriel's argument for Envoys (intelligent power) being the source of humans (Envoy soul in a human body)? See also: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmological\\_argument](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmological_argument). It should be noted that, in this case, I am NOT referring to those outdated theories. The 'first cause' that I'm suggesting here is the people trying to return the country to feudalism – with them on top.

Chapter 11, pg. 72: “mopery and dopery in the space lanes. ” This is a Heinlein-ism. Unfortunately, I can't remember which of several books it might have come from. My bet would either bet 'Red Planet' (possible) or 'Stranger in a Strange Land' (MUCH more possible). Further edit – 'Citizen of the Galaxy', and the actual quote is “mopery and dopery in the spaceways”.

Chapter 11, pg. 75: 'Rod of Asclepius '. “The caduceus is sometimes used as a symbol of medicine and/or medical practice, especially in North America. Both the traditional medical symbol, the rod of Asclepius, which has only a single snake and no wings, and the caduceus are in current use regardless of historical confusion.” The Caduceus' use as a symbol of medicine was a mistake by an army officer. Mark suggests using the original Greek rod of Asclepius, as “the god Asclepius, [was] a deity associated with healing and medicinal arts in Greek mythology.” See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caduceus> for the Caduceus, and [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod\\_of\\_Asclepius](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rod_of_Asclepius) for the rod of Asclepius.

Chapter 13, pg. 87: New York State Police uniform. Purple seems to be thematic for them. See <http://www.nystpba.org/Yournystroopers.aspx>. The hat is the one that Tex hides behind his back. His comment, “At least it's gray”, refers to the hat band, which for the New York State Police, is purple. And yes, New York State Police officers wear a purple tie against a gray uniform. I should know. I lived in New York State for a good portion of my life, and have the utmost respect for those officers. The full uniform can be seen in this photo, [http://www.fotothing.com/photos/8a4/8a497619857fddb58f6d5904e450013\\_fc0.jpg](http://www.fotothing.com/photos/8a4/8a497619857fddb58f6d5904e450013_fc0.jpg).

Chapter 14, pg. 95: “Betty, there's an old saying that 'The job isn't finished until the paperwork is done'. I've usually seen it under a picture of a person sitting on a toilet.” I've actually seen that cartoon, but unfortunately I can't seem to find a copy to show you.

Chapter 17, pg. 116: “Tommy, you're a philosopher. There's nothing honest about you.

Honest.” I LOVE double reversals. Maybe because I hold a Bachelor of Art's degree in Philosophy – a B.A. In BS.

Chapter 20, pg. 136: “Mine is for my maiden name, the hunting version of the Scot tartan.” Edith Scot MacLaren – Maiden name, Edith Laurel Scot. This is a personal reference. My maternal grandmother. Sometimes, when an author goes looking for names, ones from the past just pop out at him (or her). And this seemed as good a place as any to use the name.

Chapter 21, pg. 139: “An End of Childhood”. Name referenced from Arthur C. Clarke's 'Childhood's End'. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childhood%27s\\_End](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Childhood%27s_End). Fran grows up.

Chapter 24, pg. 158: “A Surprise Around Every Corner”. And if I have to explain this, you never saw the movie, Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willy\\_Wonka\\_%26\\_the\\_Chocolate\\_Factory](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Willy_Wonka_%26_the_Chocolate_Factory).

Chapter 24, pg. 159: “Buggy whips”. From <http://www.buggy-whips.com/buggywhips/> “The buggy whip is now known as an analogy of businesses disrupted by innovation. Buggy whips are often cited in business cases as one of the industries that did not adapt with the advent of the automobile, and thus began the demise of the industry.” I couldn't have said it better, myself.

Chapter 24, pg. 160: Al-Azhar University: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Azhar\\_University](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Azhar_University).

Chapter 24, pg. 160: William and Mary : [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College\\_of\\_William\\_%26\\_Mary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/College_of_William_%26_Mary).

Chapter 24, pg. 163: “I know!” the President said. “It's your fault. That makes you responsible, so you can chaperon yourself.” This actually stems from Circus World (1981), a science fiction collection by Barry B. Longyear. In the book, he describes a geological rift that the circus company is trying to name. They end up naming it after the man that caused them to crash land on an obscure planet off the space lanes. It's HIS fault.

Chapter 30, pg. 197: Tom O'Bedlam - see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom\\_o%27\\_Bedlam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tom_o%27_Bedlam) and see if YOU can figure it all out.

Chapter 30, pg. 199: Lord Haw Haw , [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord\\_Haw-Haw](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord_Haw-Haw). I'm using it, not in its original sense, but perhaps as a parody of a parody. What Taylor has done is imitate the stereotypical “British snob” of feudal and semi-feudal society.

Chapter 30, pg. 202: Peeler – see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History\\_of\\_the\\_Metropolitan\\_Police\\_Service](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Metropolitan_Police_Service). The use isn't absolutely correct, as the term Peeler for the forces created by Robert Peel were only called that in Northern Ireland. They were called Bobbies in Britain. In fact, the slang term may be out of date, now.

Chapter 36, pg 240: “Computer encryption has the ability to be much better, but is too complicated for a person to understand in the field without another, equal, computer. So that

left us with only human capabilities. ” This is true, as far as it goes. With the proliferation of more powerful smart-phones, tablets, and laptop computers, this distinction is fading some. But in principle, it still pertains. The person in the field **MUST** be able to decode the message, and that leaves out some of the more complicated versions that computers, alone, can handle. After all, a phone, tablet, or laptop can malfunction or be lost in the field.





## Meet the Author

Craig A. Eddy

I'm 67, retired and proud of it. I live in a science fiction world. When I was 14, I wanted a computer that would do the things the room sized ones could do, but would fit in a briefcase. I was thinking small. What I ended up with a few years later was one that could do those things and fit in my shirt pocket. And it's just gotten better. I've been a CAD operator (18 1/2 years) and a number of other things in my life, and now I write fantasy novels for my own amusement using a computer with no paid software on it. All free. Even the operating system (Linux).

Currently writing Fantasy books that are available as PDF files under Creative Commons License.

Bragging rights:

I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy a B.A. in BS